

May 11, 2018

Legislative Press Bureau at (401) 528-1743

THIS WEEK AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE — Here are the highlights from news and events that took place in the General Assembly this week. For more information on any of these items visit <http://www.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease>



- **Senate OKs bill to create Aging and Disability Resource Center**
The Senate approved legislation ([2018-S 2551](#)) sponsored by Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence) to create the Aging and Disability Resource Center within the Department of Human Services' Division of Elderly Affairs to help connect Rhode Islanders with helpful resources for long-term care. The bill now goes to the House, where Rep. Lauren H. Carson (D-Dist. 75, Newport) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2018-H 7172](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate passes legislation to help St. Joseph pension plan members**
The Senate approved legislation ([2018-S 2112](#)) sponsored by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggiero (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) to better position the members of the insolvent St. Joseph's Health Services pension plan to reach fair, equitable settlements with multiple defendants, which is a possible outcome of the case. The bill now goes to the House, where House Majority Leader K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) has introduced companion legislation ([2018-H 8166](#)).
[Click here to see Senate news release.](#)
[Click here to see House news release.](#)
- **Sen. Da Ponte bill that protects pensions during hospital sales passed Senate**
Sen. Daniel Da Ponte's (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) legislation ([2018-S 2467aa](#)) that would require the general treasurer to conduct a review of any defined pension plans involved in the sale and acquisition of any hospital that are not covered by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 was passed by the Senate. The

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legislation was in response to the collapse of the St. Joseph Health Services pension fund.

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▪ **Senate OKs micro-zone act sponsored by Satchell**

The Senate approved legislation ([2018-S 2068](#)) sponsored by Sen. Adam J. Satchell (D-Dist. 9, West Warwick) to create “micro-zones” in exceptionally distressed areas and encourage revitalization in those zones through a combination of expedited permitting and tax and fee waivers. Rep. Robert D. Phillips (D-Dist. 51, Woonsocket, Cumberland) is sponsoring the legislation ([2018-H 7553](#)) in the House.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **Bill would allow for lifesaving fentanyl test strips to prevent overdose deaths**

Advocates spoke out in support of a bill ([2018-H 8132](#)) introduced by Rep. Aaron Regunberg (D-Dist. 4, Providence) to solidify the legality of fentanyl test strips that identify the presence of the opioid in illicit drugs and are a cost-effective means to prevent overdose.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **House oversight hears update on UHIP progress**

The House Committee on Oversight, which is chaired by Rep. Patricia Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry, Warwick), heard an update on progress of the trouble-ridden Unified Health Infrastructure Project. Health and Human Services Secretary Eric J. Beane reported progress in cutting the backlog of food stamp applications, but several representatives of nursing homes reported that the loss or delay of Medicaid applications continues to be a problem.

▪ **Rep. Costantino bill would require unpaid tax notification for car registrations**

Rep. Gregory J. Costantino (D-Dist. 44, Lincoln, Smithfield, Johnston) has introduced legislation ([2018-H 8117](#)) that would force the Rhode Island Division of Motor Vehicles to continue a longstanding policy of sending motorists notice to renew their registrations even though they owe back taxes. The legislation would require the DMV to provide the normal notice by mail when a vehicle registration is due for renewal whether or not there are taxes owed.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **Lawmakers join with governor, State Police to highlight new hands-free law**

Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) and Rep. Kathleen A. Fogarty (D-Dist. 35, South Kingstown), who sponsored last year’s law ([2017-S 0175A](#), [2017-H 5182](#)) prohibiting drivers from using hand-held wireless communication devices while driving, joined with Gov. Gina Raimondo, the Department of Transportation and the State Police at AAA Northeast’s Providence headquarters to remind the public that the law goes into effect on June 1. Beginning that day, violators will be subject to a fine of no more than \$100. That fine can be suspended for a first-time violator who provides proof of acquisition of a hands-free accessory subsequent to the violation and prior to the imposition of the fine.

▪ **Rep. Amore questions compassion center finances**

Rep. Gregg Amore (D-Dist. 65, East Providence) has written to the top regulator of the state's medical marijuana program seeking information on the finances of the three compassion centers in Rhode Island after testimony was delivered to the House Committee on Finance relating to the governor's budget proposal ([Article 17](#)) to expand the number of compassion centers in Rhode Island from three to 15 facilities. Specifically, Representative Amore wants to understand how a nonprofit entity would be able to give the state an additional \$5 million, the amount of money expected to be generated if the expansion is implemented, so that the number of compassion centers remain at the current number of three.

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **Revenue Estimating Conference ends with budget surplus**

The Revenue Estimating Conference ended its spring session this week with the announcement of a \$132 million budget surplus. The conference meets twice yearly in the spring and the fall. The conference consists of the state budget officer, the Senate fiscal advisor, and the House fiscal advisor, where they must reach a consensus on what the state general revenues and caseload expenses are estimated to be for the current fiscal year and the budget year. The General Assembly and the state budget office use these projections to prepare the budget.

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