

# Shoreline access bill passes in Rhode Island House; fate in Senate uncertain

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House lawmakers have passed a bill that would define where beachgoers can legally be along Rhode Island's shoreline.

by Alex Nunes



Beachgoers in Westerly, R.I.  
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The shoreline access bill aims to clarify where people can do things like walk, fish and collect seaweed on rocky or sandy shoreline, with the hope of preventing disputes between beachgoers and private property owners along the coast. But despite passing in the House in a 64-0 vote, the future of the legislation is unclear.

There is no Senate companion bill, and Senate spokesperson Greg Paré said in an email the proposal “is not a focus at this time” and Senate lawmakers “have not had hearings on it or conducted any of the necessary diligence on it at this point.”

Paré said, “The Senate President [Dominick Ruggerio] is focused [on] passing Senate bills and on utilizing our record surplus to provide relief to struggling Rhode Islanders.”

In a recent interview, Governor Dan McKee also did not commit either way on the House bill.

“The principle of the idea I’m on board with,” McKee said. “If it comes to the desk, we’ll evaluate the policy and then determine whether it actually fits the need or whether it’s an overreach.”

The House bill came out of a special commission set up last year to study public access along the shore in Rhode Island. It defines the area where the public can be as within six feet landward of the recognizable high tide line, where seaweed and other debris wash up.

Rhode Island’s Constitution guarantees so-called “privileges of the shore,” but it doesn’t outline where people can actually exercise their rights.

A state Supreme Court decision from the 1980s says the public can access up to a multi-year mean high tide line, but advocates say that threshold is insufficient and too hard to determine.

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