

# State of Rhode Island

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# JOURNAL

-OF THE-

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**JANUARY SESSION** of the General Assembly begun and held at the State House in the City of Providence on Tuesday, the Sixth Day of January in the year of Our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty-Six.

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Volume 153, No. 1

Tuesday, January 6, 2026

First Day

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The House of Representatives meets at the State House in Providence on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, and is called to order at 4:05 o'clock P.M. by the Honorable K. Joseph Shekarchi, Speaker.

The roll is called and a quorum is declared present with 62 members present and 13 members absent as follows:

**PRESENT** – 62: The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi and Representatives Abney, Ackerman, Ajello, Alzate, Azzinaro, Baginski, Bennett, Biah, Blazejewski, Boylan, Brien, Caldwell, Casey, Casimiro, Chippendale, Corvese, Cotter, Craven, Cruz, Dawson, DeSimone, Diaz, Donovan, Fascia, Fellela, Finkelman, Fogarty, Giraldo, Handy, Hopkins, Kazarian, Kennedy, Knight, Lombardi, Marszalkowski, McEntee, McGaw, McNamara, Messier, Morales, Nardone, Newberry, Noret, O'Brien, Paplauskas, Perez, Phillips, Place, Potter, Read, Roberts, Santucci, Serpa, Shallcross Smith, Shanley, Solomon, Speakman, Spears, Stewart, Tanzi, and Voas.

**ABSENT** – 13: Representatives Batista, Carson, Cortvriend, Costantino, Edwards, Felix, Furtado, Hull, Kislak, Lima, Quattrocchi, Sanchez, and Slater.

## MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi respectfully requests that the entire House pause for a Moment of Silence in memory of the victims of the horrific events at Brown University on December 13<sup>th</sup>: Freshman Mukhammad Aziz Umurzokov, age 18, and sophomore Ella Cook, age 19. Let us all keep these victims, as well as the survivors and all others affected by the violence at Brown University on that dark day, in our hearts and minds.

## INVOCATION

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi presents Speaker Pro Tempore Brian Patrick Kennedy, who delivers the Invocation and leads the membership in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

(For Invocation, see Appendix, this Journal.)

### **APPROVAL OF RECORD**

By unanimous consent, the House Journal of Thursday, June 20, 2025, is approved.

### **COMMUNICATIONS**

Representative Lauren H. Carson is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.  
Representative Rebecca M. Kislak is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.  
Representative John G. Edwards is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.  
Representative Terri Cortvriend is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.

### **ADJOURNMENT OF 2025 SESSION**

On the motion of Majority Leader Blazejewski, seconded by Minority Leader Chippendale, the House adjourns the 2025 session on a voice vote.

### **COMMENCEMENT OF 2026**

The roll is called and a quorum is declared present with 68 members present and 7 members absent as follows:

**PRESENT** – 68: The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi and Representatives Abney, Ackerman, Ajello, Alzate, Azzinaro, Baginski, Batista, Bennett, Biah, Blazejewski, Boylan, Brien, Caldwell, Casey, Casimiro, Chippendale, Corvese, Cotter, Craven, Cruz, Dawson, DeSimone, Diaz, Donovan, Fascia, Felix, Fellela, Finkelman, Fogarty, Furtado, Giraldo, Handy, Hopkins, Hull, Kazarian, Kennedy, Knight, Lombardi, Marszalkowski, McEntee, McGaw, McNamara, Messier, Morales, Nardone, Newberry, Noret, O'Brien, Paplauskas, Perez, Phillips, Place, Potter, Read, Roberts, Sanchez, Santucci, Serpa, Shallcross Smith, Shanley, Slater, Solomon, Speakman, Spears, Stewart, Tanzi, and Voas.

**ABSENT** – 7: Representatives Carson, Cortvriend, Costantino, Edwards, Kislak, Lima, and Quattrocchi.

### **COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER**

January 6, 2026

Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi makes the following appointments:

#### **Appointed to the House Judiciary Committee**

Representative Carol McEntee, Chair  
Representative Jason Knight, First Vice Chair  
Representative Matthew Dawson, Second Vice Chair

**Read and placed on file.**

**COMMUNICATIONS**

Representative Lauren H. Carson is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.  
Representative Rebecca M. Kislak is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.  
Representative John G. Edwards is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.  
Representative Terri Cortvriend is unable to attend session today, Tuesday, January 6, 2026.

By unanimous consent, the House returns to:

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

Chairwoman McEntee expresses her heartfelt thanks to Majority Leader Blazejewski and Speaker Shekarchi for appointing her Chairwoman of the House Judiciary Committee. She would also like to congratulate Representative Knight on being appointed 1st Vice-Chair and Representative Dawson on being appointed 2nd Vice-Chair of the Judiciary Committee.

**OPENING DAY ADDRESS**

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi addresses the members of the House.

(For the Honorable Speaker's Address, see the appendix of the Journal)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Majority Leader Blazejewski thanks the Speaker for his remarks and for welcoming everyone back to open the 2026 legislative session, then offers brief remarks.

Majority Leader Blazejewski announces that the Legislative Council representatives are on the floor with most of the pre-filed legislation, and that legislation may be introduced at today's session. As is our standard practice, the legislation will appear on the House website tomorrow.

Majority Leader Blazejewski announces that the next House session will be this Thursday, January 8th, at 4:00 p.m. Next Tuesday, January 13th, the House will meet in session at 5:00 p.m., one hour later than its usual start time. At 7:00 p.m., Governor McKee will deliver his annual State of the State Address to members of the House and Senate in this chamber.

Majority Leader Blazejewski congratulates Representative Carol Hogan McEntee on her appointment as Chairwoman of the House Judiciary Committee.

Majority Leader Blazejewski and Speaker Shekarchi wish Speaker Pro Tempore Brian Patrick Kennedy a Happy Birthday!

Majority Whip Kazarian recognizes today, January 6, as Armenian Christmas.

**IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION****House Resolution No. 7000**

**BY** Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Chippendale, Ajello, Biah, DeSimone, Marszalkowski, Boylan, Hull, Abney

**ENTITLED**, HOUSE RESOLUTION HONORING THE MEMORY OF ELLA COOK AND MUKHAMMAD AZIZ UMURZOKOV VICTIMS OF THE MASS SHOOTING AT BROWN UNIVERSITY {LC3541/1}

With the agreement of the majority and the minority, on behalf of Speaker Shekarchi, Majority Leader Blazejewski requests unanimous consent for immediate consideration.

There is no objection.

Majority Leader Blazejewski discusses the resolution.

Read and passed, on a motion of Majority Leader Blazejewski, seconded by Speaker Shekarchi, and many others, by unanimous consent, on a rising vote.

**House Resolution No. 7001**

**BY** Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Chippendale, Ajello, Biah, DeSimone, Marszalkowski, Boylan, Hull, Abney

**ENTITLED**, HOUSE RESOLUTION PRAISING THE RHODE ISLAND AND FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES, PROVIDENCE MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY, RHODE ISLAND ATTORNEY GENERAL PETER NERONHA, COLONEL OSCAR PEREZ, CHIEF OF THE PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT, PROVIDENCE FIRE CHIEF DEREK SILVA, AND THE HEROIC MEDICAL PERSONNEL, PARTICULARLY THOSE AT RHODE ISLAND HOSPITAL, WHO SAVED THE LIVES OF MANY OF THE SHOOTING VICTIMS AT BROWN UNIVERSITY {LC3542/1}

With the agreement of the majority and the minority, on behalf of Speaker Shekarchi, Majority Leader Blazejewski requests unanimous consent for immediate consideration.

There is no objection.

Majority Leader Blazejewski discusses the resolution.

Read and passed, on a motion of Majority Leader Blazejewski, seconded by Speaker Shekarchi, and many others, by unanimous consent, on a rising vote.

By unanimous consent, the House returns to:

**TRANSMITTAL**

By unanimous consent, all matters on the clerk's desk are ordered to be transmitted to His Excellency, the Governor, to the Honorable Senate and the Honorable Secretary of State forthwith.

(For Transmittals to Governor, see Appendix of this Journal.)

## **DESK HELD OPEN**

The Honorable Speaker Shekarchi announces that the desk will be held open.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **House Bill No. 7002**

**BY** Corvese, Noret, Brien, Azzinaro

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- BOARD OF MEDICAL LICENSURE AND DISCIPLINE (Prohibits healthcare providers and health plans from denying the payment of a medical bill, solely because the bill may have arisen from a third-party claim.) {LC3564/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House Corporations

### **House Bill No. 7003**

**BY** McNamara, Shekarchi, Ackerman, Casey, Solomon, Morales, Paplauskas, Hopkins, Fascia, Boylan

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PUPILS (Directs the state department of education to establish an anti-hazing policy in student athletics.) {LC3202/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House Education

### **House Bill No. 7004**

**BY** Boylan, Handy, Knight, McGaw, Bennett, Potter, Fogarty, Spears, Speakman

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- RHODE ISLAND CLIMATE SUPERFUND ACT OF 2026 (Creates the Rhode Island Climate Superfund Act of 2026.) {LC3571/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House Environment and Natural Resources

### **House Bill No. 7005**

**BY** Boylan, Knight

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- PROPERTY SUBJECT TO TAXATION (Authorizes the town of Barrington to provide a tax dollar credit reduction for legally blind persons by ordinance.) {LC3126/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House Municipal Government & Housing

### **House Bill No. 7006**

**BY** Corvese

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- SALES AND USE TAXES -- LIABILITY AND COMPUTATION (Expands the definition of “book or other writing” to sales up to one thousand five hundred (1,500) copies and deny the sales tax exemption for third-party sales.) {LC3561/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House Municipal Government & Housing

**House Bill No. 7007**

(Secretary of State)

**BY** O'Brien, Shanley, Solomon, Dawson, Biah, McEntee, Noret, Read, Azzinaro, Corvese**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS (Entitles disabled and military voters to utilize electronically transmitted ballots.) {LC3125/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House State Government &amp; Elections

**House Bill No. 7008****BY** Corvese**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES -- PARKING FACILITIES AND PRIVILEGES (Includes the governor's commission on disabilities in the decision making process for the disability parking enforcement enhancement program and requires an annual report be submitted to the governor's commission.) {LC3563/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House State Government &amp; Elections

**House Resolution No. 7009****BY** Corvese**ENTITLED**, JOINT RESOLUTION RESPECTFULLY REQUESTING A CONVENTION OF THE STATES UNDER ARTICLE V OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION (Petitions congress to call a convention for the purpose of proposing amendments to the U.S. Constitution to impose restraints on the federal government.) {LC3562/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House State Government &amp; Elections

**House Bill No. 7010****BY** Corvese**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES -- MEDICAL ASSISTANCE (Provides that licensed independent clinical social workers be able to enroll and bill Medicaid directly for covered services provided to adults with Medicaid fee-for-service coverage.) {LC3557/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House Finance

**House Resolution No. 7011****BY** McNamara, Handy, Fascia**ENTITLED**, JOINT RESOLUTION MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO THE RHODE ISLAND AUDITORY ORAL PROGRAM (Authorizes the appropriation of the sum of \$1,167,100 to the Rhode Island Auditory Oral Program, to support it's mission.) {LC3149/1}

01/07/2026 Introduced, referred to House Finance

**ADJOURNMENT**

At 4:35 o'clock P.M., on motion of Majority Leader Blazejewski, seconded by Minority Leader Chippendale, the House adjourns, on a unanimous voice vote.

**Diane M. DePina**  
**Recording Clerk**

**APPENDIX****INVOCATION****SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE BRIAN PATRICK KENNEDY**

Almighty God: As we begin this session, let us pray for all the members of our House of Representatives. They have been granted the great privilege and tremendous responsibility of conducting the people's business. Be with them this day, and every day, as they strive to serve the needs of their communities. Amen

**APPENDIX****OPENING DAY REMARKS****BY SPEAKER SHEKARCHI**

Members of the House: welcome.

We open our session with heavy hearts: just a few short weeks ago, our community was rocked by an act of horrific violence right here in Providence when a gunman opened fire on a group of Brown University students studying for final exams.

Many House members are parents, and I know you eagerly await your college-aged children coming home for the holidays. Our hearts are broken for the parents whose children did not return, for the countless others injured and impacted by this senseless violence, and for the loved ones of all those affected.

These events have greatly rattled our community. As we continue to process and heal, I have been heartened by how effectively our city, state, and federal agencies responded in unison to the unspeakable.

First responders and frontline workers – Providence police, fire, and EMTs; state police; federal marshals; hospital staff, doctors, and nurses – all stepped up. They courageously ran in, triaged the scene, and cared for the victims.

We are fortunate to have a Level One Trauma Center right here at Rhode Island Hospital. Specialized doctors were on hand immediately. This tragedy would undoubtedly have been even more catastrophic had our first responders and medical personnel not been trained to act so quickly and effectively.

These last difficult weeks have emphasized what we all know to be true: Rhode Islanders come together in difficult times.

Today, as state representatives, we come together once again in this esteemed chamber to do our job for the people of Rhode Island. My philosophy – which many of you share – is that government is at its best when it is able to take care of people. When we craft our state budget every year, it is our responsibility to meet the moment.

Meeting the moment this year will require us to look for ways to mitigate the impact of massive changes at the federal level. Approximately one-third of our annual state budget is derived from federal funding. It is abundantly clear that we face great uncertainty in virtually all areas of national policy, from education to environment to healthcare initiatives. I am hearing mounting concern about this from every part of the community: working families, veterans, and older Rhode Islanders alike.

And this concern is well-founded. As we have witnessed at the federal level, government spending cuts often have unintended consequences. “Reducing spending” can also mean that needy families no longer have the SNAP benefits they rely upon to feed their children. It means that thousands of

Rhode Islanders could be in jeopardy of losing their health insurance. And it means that our state can no longer rely upon many of the funding streams we have leveraged for programs, including infrastructure and education.

Fortunately, we anticipated federal changes and did what we could to plan ahead. The General Assembly required reports from the administration on how the federal legislation will impact our state, and we will use this critical data to guide our decision-making going forward.

Our state budget is so much more than a balance sheet: it's a policy statement about our values. Government does not function like a corporation, nor should it. Our bottom line isn't about profits or shareholders; it's about the well-being of the people of Rhode Island: our children, our students, our workers, our older Rhode Islanders.

I am proud that since I became Speaker, we have passed six bipartisan, balanced budgets. These budgets have prioritized healthcare, education, and taking care of our most vulnerable.

Over the last five years, we have worked together as a body to meet the very pressing needs of the Rhode Islanders we serve. Notwithstanding the current uncertainty and change, we will continue to build upon the good work of previous sessions, especially in key areas like health care, housing, and home energy costs. We are abundantly aware that these costs are rising quickly for Rhode Island families. I pledge to continue to bring people together to provide relief to families struggling with these mounting costs.

In 2025, healthcare was a major focus. In addition to containing rising costs, we have been very concerned about access to care. When we crafted our state budget, we allocated about \$40 million toward Medicaid rate increases for primary care providers, not only to make Rhode Island more aligned with neighboring states, but also to keep our valued doctors here in Rhode Island. The General Assembly also allocated an additional \$38 million over the governor's proposal for hospital reimbursement rates and direct support payments.

We also added \$12 million above the governor's proposal to increase reimbursement rates for staff at nursing homes as part of our revision to the state's safe staffing law.

In addition to allocating necessary funding, we also implemented targeted legislative solutions to help our overburdened healthcare system and the patients who use it. By bringing stakeholders to the table, we offered meaningful new protections for Rhode Islanders facing crushing medical debt.

Additionally, we created a pilot program prohibiting insurers from requiring prior authorization for medically necessary health care services – removing a roadblock that slows patient care and takes up hours of provider and staff time every day.

All last session, I worked hard with both Republicans and Democrats on a new law sponsored by our Independent member. This law protects 340B, a critical discount program that enables safety-net health care agencies to provide lower-cost prescription drugs.

I am highlighting just a few of the measures we undertook in the past session to bolster our healthcare system. We must continue to connect stakeholders and patients in order to provide cost relief and new solutions across the healthcare spectrum.

For much of the past year, my attention has been on our state's safety net hospitals. This summer, I spent many hours in negotiations, bringing parties together, and ultimately helped resolve the Butler Hospital strike.

Currently, there is significant concern about the situation around Roger Williams and Fatima Hospitals. My father was a surgeon at Pawtucket Memorial Hospital, and I saw how much the surrounding communities were impacted when that hospital closed. I do not want to see a major disruption to the already burdened healthcare system. I will continue to work with the attorney general, the governor, Senate leaders, and the workers of both hospitals on the best path forward.

There is no doubt that healthcare will continue to be at the top of our agenda, and we will be laser-focused on increasing accessibility and lowering costs in 2026.

I appreciate that so many of you continue to share my strong commitment to making housing affordable. In the last five years, we have passed more than 60 new housing laws to streamline development, cut red tape, and increase production.

Other states are noticing what we've been doing, and they're following our lead! Over the summer, I met with Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey, and most of our discussion was about housing and how our states could potentially work together on regional solutions.

I also spoke at the first-ever housing policy summit held by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Housing is a top issue for every state. A robust housing supply is essential for economic development. Housing is where jobs go to sleep at night!

In Rhode Island, we are seeing positive results: building permits have been up, a 70% increase from 2022 to 2023, and they rose again in 2024. This is the biggest increase since the Great Recession. Increasing our housing stock is critical to bring down the costs of rent for Rhode Island families, a priority for this chamber.

In addition to the escalating costs of housing and medical care, consumers are also being hit hard with energy cost hikes this winter.

I am very proud of our record on environmental initiatives: combating climate change, creating good, clean energy jobs, and addressing increasing utility costs for Rhode Island households.

However, we are now facing significant headwinds at the federal level. Numerous emission regulations and clean energy incentives have been rolled back. The nearly completed Revolution Wind project, which would be able to provide power for about 350,000 homes and help reduce energy costs, has been significantly delayed.

Although the federal position has changed, we will continue to press forward. Our goals remain: clean, renewable energy at prices our families can afford.

Difficult decisions await us as we navigate this changing federal landscape, which often feels chaotic.

And on this fifth anniversary of January 6th, stress on the constitutional order and the rule of law is on the minds of many in this nation and in this room. All states will be forced to confront new burdens related to significant policy and funding shifts on the federal level. We are no different. There is no doubt that families are shouldering significant burdens: many are caring for older parents and young children at the same time as the cost of everything rises. It is not easy.

I am also extremely mindful that each day when the school bell rings, there is real strain on students, parents, and educators who worry about the physical and mental well-being of every student in Rhode Island.

We passed an important law last session. It will ban cell phone use during school days. I am hopeful that this law will provide a measurable improvement in the social and learning environments for all of our students.

Studies have shown that banning cell phones helps educational outcomes. I firmly believe that it will also improve school communities and help ease the mental health burdens of our treasured students.

Strong communities take care of each other, especially in difficult times. Strong legislatures listen to the community and strive to meet the moment.

Colleagues, let's buckle up and buckle down. It's going to be a very challenging year, but our constituents and our state need our thoughtful hard work - now more than ever.

I pledge to work as hard as I can to live up to the trust that my neighbors and all of you have placed in me. Having seen all the good we've done together, I have faith that inclusion, collaboration, and bringing people together are the best ways to find good solutions that help all Rhode Islanders.

Now, let's get to work to meet the moment for the great people of the State of Rhode Island!  
God bless you all.