

March 5, 2021

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>



- **House unveils affordable housing push, OKs bill against income discrimination**
House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) announced that the House will focus this session on addressing the state's housing crisis, and introduced several bills aimed at creating more affordable housing, including one by Deputy Majority Whip Mia A. Ackerman (D-Dist. 45, Cumberland, Lincoln) requiring municipalities to allow tiny homes to be used as accessory dwelling units and count them as affordable housing. The House passed the first ([2021-H 5257aa](#)) of the bills, sponsored by Labor Committee Chairwoman Anastasia P. Williams (D-Dist. 9, Providence), to prohibit housing discrimination against those who receive government assistance to pay their rent. Sen. Meghan E. Kallman (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, North Providence) is sponsoring that bill in the Senate ([2021-S 0121](#)).
[Click here to see housing package release.](#)
[Click here to release on House passage of bill prohibiting income discrimination.](#)
[Click here to see tiny houses release.](#)
- **Senate passes bill to address wage gaps**
The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0270](#)) sponsored by Sen. Gayle L. Goldin (D-Dist. 3, Providence) to address pay gaps and help women and people of color demand equal pay for equal work. It now goes to the House, where Rep. Susan R. Donovan (D-Dist. 69, Bristol, Portsmouth) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2021-H 5261](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate OKs bill increasing penalties for wage theft, employee misclassification**
The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0195](#)) introduced by Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) that would significantly increase penalties for

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both wage theft and employee misclassification in Rhode Island. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives, where similar legislation ([2021-H 5870](#)) has been introduced by Rep. Alex D. Marszalkowski (D-Dist. 52, Cumberland).

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- **House passes Baginski bill allowing alcohol with restaurant take-out**

The House of Representatives passed Rep. Jacquelyn M. Baginski's (D-Dist. 17, Cranston) legislation ([2021-H 5105A](#)) allowing restaurants to sell certain amounts of beer, wine and mixed drinks with take-out food orders. All drinks must be sold in factory sealed containers or containers sealed in such a way as to prevent re-opening without obvious evidence that the seal was removed or broken and delivery is prohibited. The legislation now heads to the Senate for consideration, where similar legislation ([2021-S 0555](#)) has been introduced by Sen. Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick).

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- **Vella-Wilkinson bill would give tribal recognition to Seaconke Wampanoags**

Rep. Camille F.J. Vella-Wilkinson (D-Dist. 21, Warwick) has introduced legislation ([2021-H 5385](#)) that would grant tribal recognition to the Seaconke Wampanoags for the limited purposes of assisting in establishing eligibility for federal benefits and to protect the tribe in preserving artifacts, ceremonies and practices. Similar legislation ([2021-S 0441](#)) has been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Dawn Euer (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown).

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- **McNamara bill would have school districts develop COVID recovery plans**

Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston) has introduced legislation ([2021-H 5834](#)) that would require school districts to develop COVID recovery plans that would include strategies and targets for students to address losses in student academic and social emotional learning that has occurred during the COVID-19 crisis.

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- **Giraldo, Acosta unveil package of private prison reform bills**

Rep. Joshua J. Giraldo (D-Dist. 56, Central Falls) and Sen. Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) have introduced a package of comprehensive prison reform legislation. The first bill ([2021-H 5749](#), [2021-S 0399](#)) would repeal the Municipal Detention Facility Corporations law and prohibit the operation of private detention facilities and private public partnerships within the state. Those currently in operation could continue to do so until Dec. 31, 2028. The second bill ([2021-H 5750](#), [2021-S 0400](#)) would prohibit contracts with private, for-profit prison facilities or with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

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- **Kazarian bill would hold utilities accountable for outages and restoration**

House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence) has introduced legislation ([2021-H 5956](#)) that would hold utility companies accountable for outages and utility restoration during storms and emergencies. The legislation, modeled after a bill enacted in Massachusetts in 2009, would grant the chair of the

Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers (DPUC) emergency powers during governor-declared emergencies for the restoration of all utility services. The bill will also require the DPUC to adopt rules and regulations to establish standards for emergency preparation and restoration of utility service and to establish penalties for violation of these standards. Any fees or penalties collected by the DPUC would be directly returned to the ratepayers.

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- **Rep. McGaw bill would prevent approval of carbon-polluting power plants**
Legislation ([2021-H 5279](#)) sponsored by Rep. Michelle E. McGaw (D-Dist. 71, Portsmouth, Tiverton, Little Compton) would require the state's Energy Facility Siting Board to deny applications for power plants that would have adverse effects on Rhode Island's ability to meet its carbon-emissions-reduction goals. Companion legislation ([2021-S 0127](#)) has been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Jeanine Calkin (D-Dist.30, Warwick).
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- **Sen. de la Cruz, Rep. Place decry 'shadow closure' attempt at Zambarano**
Senate Minority Whip Jessica de la Cruz, (R-Dist. 23, North Smithfield, Burrillville, Glocester) and Rep. David J. Place, (R-Dist. 47, Burrillville, Glocester) vowed to continue fighting to keep Burrillville's Zambarano Unit of Eleanor Slater Hospital open, amid disclosure from a retired hospital administrator that the state plans to close the skilled care facility and discharge those patients unable to receive care anywhere else. The former administrator said the move stems from a loss of federal funding resulting from the state's failure to modernize health records at the facility.
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