

March 25, 2022

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.rilin.state.ri.us/News/>.



- **Assembly OKs temporary lift on cap of days worked by retired teachers**
The General Assembly passed legislation sponsored by Rep. Gregg Amore (D-Dist. 65, East Providence) and Sen. Stephen R. Archambault (D-Dist. 22, Smithfield, North Providence, Johnston) to temporarily suspend the cap on the number of days retired educators can work without penalty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently allowable under an executive order set to expire March 31, the practice will be extended through the end of the school year by the legislation ([2022-H 7825](#), [2022-S 2560](#)). The bill also provides greater flexibility in school transportation and allows registered nurse graduates to work pending licensure to ease the nurse shortage while the state still combats COVID-19 and its impacts.
[Click here to see news release](#)
- **Senate approves bill enacting Obamacare consumer protections in state law**
The Senate approved legislation ([2022-S 2080A](#)) sponsored by Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) to enact many of the consumer-protection elements of the federal Affordable Care Act — commonly called “Obamacare” — into state law. The bill would provide Rhode Islanders with permanent protections, such as prohibiting insurers from denying coverage due to pre-existing medical conditions, even if the federal law is ever weakened or repealed. The bill goes to the House, where Rep. June S. Speakman (D-Dist. 68, Warren, Bristol) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2022-H 7560](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **House OKs bill granting employee restroom access to those with medical issues**
The House passed a bill ([2022-H 7392](#)) introduced by House Deputy Majority Whip
More...

Mia Ackerman (D-Dist. 45, Cumberland, Lincoln) to require retail establishments with three or more employees on the premises without public restroom facilities to allow customers suffering from eligible medical conditions access to their employee restrooms upon presentation of documentation issued by a licensed physician. The measure now moves to the Senate, where Sen. Tiara Mack (D-Dist. 6, Providence) has introduced a companion bill ([2022-S 2719](#)).

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

- **Euer, Handy bill, backed by McKee, seeks additional 600 MW of offshore wind**
Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Dawn Euer (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) and Rep. Arthur Handy (D-Dist. 18, Cranston) joined Gov. Dan McKee and state and local officials to announce the introduction of their legislation ([2022-S 2583](#), [2022-H 7971](#)) to require a market-competitive procurement for approximately 600 megawatts of newly-developed offshore wind capacity. If enacted, Rhode Island’s primary utility company would be required to issue a request for proposals by Aug. 15.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **House passes bill for custody procedures for pets in divorce cases**
The House passed legislation sponsored by Deputy Speaker Charlene M. Lima (D-Dist. 14, Cranston, Providence) on pet custody in divorce proceedings. The legislation ([2022-H 7087](#)) directs the courts to consider factors such as who owned the animal first or whether it was acquired following marriage, who tended to the animal’s needs, which living arrangement is best for the animal and whether children were involved in its care.
[Click here to see news release](#)
- **Senate roundtable discussion highlights climate action priorities**
The Senate hosted “An Environmental Roundtable Discussion: Renewable Energy, Clean Water & Jobs,” which brought together senators, advocates and others from the community to discuss proposals to increase Rhode Island’s reliance on renewable energy, protect water resources, and better prepare the state’s workforce for the green jobs created by environmental and climate resiliency initiatives.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Murray, Handy sponsor legislation to lift families out of deep poverty**
Sen. Melissa Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) and Rep. Arthur Handy (D-Dist. 18, Cranston) are sponsoring legislation ([2022-S 2316](#), [2022-H 7789](#)) backed by the Raising Rhode Island Coalition to lift children out of deep poverty by increasing the Rhode Island Works benefit to 50% of the federal poverty level and raising it along with inflation. Under the bill, a family of three would see monthly benefits rise from \$721 to \$959. The bill also better enables them to complete their degree at CCRI, and extends the lifetime benefit limit from 48 to 60 months.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Bill would create behavioral health crisis services system, suicide hotline**
Rep. Mary Ann Shallcross Smith (D-Dist. 46, Lincoln, Pawtucket) has introduced legislation ([2022-H 7389](#)) to establish a core state behavioral health crisis services system. The system, which would be administered by the director of Behavioral

Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, would include a 9-8-8 suicide prevention hotline. Sen. Sandra Cano (D-Dist. 8, Pawtucket) is sponsoring the bill in the Senate ([2022-S 2467](#)).

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

- **Alzate, Murray bill would ensure high earners contribute their fair share**
Rep. Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket), Sen. Melissa A. Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) and the Revenue for Rhode Island coalition kicked off a campaign in support of legislation to raise revenue for the state by adding one new tax bracket – at a marginal rate of 8.99 percent (in place of the current top rate of 5.99 percent) on income above \$500,000, ensuring that the top 1 percent of earners are contributing their fair share. The coalition estimates that the legislation ([2022-H 7440](#), [2022-S 2264](#)) would raise \$144.5 million in new tax revenue.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Legislation would temporarily waive gasoline tax**
Rep. James N. McLaughlin (D-Dist. 57, Cumberland, Central Falls) has introduced legislation ([2022-H 8006](#)) to impose a moratorium on the payment of the fuel tax until Dec. 31, 2022, to help Rhode Islanders as the price of gasoline has spiked. The bill ([2022-S 2305](#)) has also been introduced in the Senate by Sen. Jessica de la Cruz (R-Dist. 23, North Smithfield, Burrillville, Glocester).
[Click here to see House news release.](#)
[Click here to see Senate news release.](#)
- **Lawson bill would expand RI Promise scholarship program to care economy**
The Senate Finance Committee heard testimony on legislation sponsored by Sen. Valarie J. Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) to expand the RI Promise scholarship program to students at Rhode Island College (RIC) for their last two years of study when attaining a degree in the care economy. The legislation ([2022-S 2591](#)) also would extend the RI Promise scholarship program to students who are unable to meet the criteria set forth in the scholarship obligations due to medical or personal leave, military obligations or disabilities.
[Click here to see news release](#)