

March 31, 2023

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>



- **Governor signs McEntee, DiMario bill extending outdoor dining**
A bill ([2023-S 0683](#), [2023-H 5264A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett) and Sen. Alana DiMario (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown, New Shoreham) allowing restaurants to continue approved outdoor dining until Feb. 15, 2024 was signed by Governor Daniel McKee. The legislation provides restaurants certainty this year as Representative McEntee, Senator DiMario and relevant stakeholders work out a way to make outdoor dining permanent.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate approves harm reduction center pilot extension**
The Senate passed legislation ([2023-S 0026](#)) introduced by Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) to extend the sunset date on a pilot program approved by the General Assembly in 2021 to create harm reduction centers, supervised facilities for drug users, staffed by health care professionals who could help in cases of overdose and make treatment referrals. The bill now goes to the House, which last week approved companion legislation ([2023-H 5044](#)) sponsored by Majority Floor Manager John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Tiverton).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate OKs wagering on in-state collegiate sports teams during tournaments**
The Senate has approved legislation ([2023-S 0003](#)) sponsored by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggiero (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) that would enable sports wagering on in-state collegiate teams when they are participating in

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tournaments that consist of four or more teams. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives.

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▪ **House OKs change to behavioral health records to improve continuum of care**

The House of Representatives approved legislation ([2023-H 5687](#)) sponsored by Rep. Rebecca Kislak (D-Dist. 4, Providence) to better provide a continuum of care to behavioral health patients by ensuring their health care providers can access the records they need to help them. The legislation would allow behavioral health records to be shared among doctors similarly to medical health care records. The bill is aimed at ensuring patients receive follow-up care after being released from a hospital. The legislation now goes to the Senate, where Sen. Mark P. McKenney (D-Dist. 30, Warwick) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2023-S 0719](#)).

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▪ **House approves Rep. Tanzi bill to help people quit smoking**

The House of Representatives passed a bill ([2023-H 5555](#)) sponsored by Rep. Teresa Tanzi (D-Dist. 34 South Kingstown, Narragansett) that would allow licensed pharmacists to prescribe tobacco cessation medications to eligible patients. The bill now heads to the Senate where Sen. Bridget Valverde (D-Dist. 35, North Kingstown, East Greenwich, South Kingstown) has introduced companion legislation ([2023-S 0292](#)).

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▪ **Senate passes Acosta bill to redefine felonies and misdemeanors**

The Senate has approved legislation sponsored by Sen. Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) to revise the state's definitions of felonies, misdemeanors and petty misdemeanors. The proposal ([2023-S 0685](#)) is the latest step in an ongoing effort to reform the state's criminal justice system through a "justice reinvestment" approach, which is focused on easing pressures on the correctional system and promoting diversion and rehabilitation while increasing public safety. The legislation now heads to the House for consideration, where Rep. Leonela Felix (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket) has introduced the bill ([2023-H 5361](#)).

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▪ **Sen. Murray introduces bill to create statewide \$100,000 tangible tax exemption**

Sen. Melissa A. Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) introduced legislation to exempt the first \$100,000 of tangible property from the tangible personal property tax to help businesses — especially small businesses — statewide. The proposed exemption would completely eliminate the tangible tax for an estimated 85% of businesses statewide.

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▪ **LaMountain, Solomon bill would allow nursing home residents more cash**

Sen. Matthew L. LaMountain (D-Dist. 31, Warwick, Cranston) and Rep. Joseph J. Solomon Jr. (D-Dist. 22, Warwick) have introduced legislation ([2023-S 0571](#), [2023-H 6205](#)) that would increase the personal needs allowance of nursing home residents from \$50 to \$100 per month. The allowance is the amount of monthly income a

Medicaid-funded nursing home resident can keep of their personal income.

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▪ **Kallman seeks to tackle housing costs, climate with transit-oriented development**

Sen. Meghan Kallman (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, Providence) is sponsoring a bill ([2023-S 0800](#)) that would establish a transit-oriented development program to promote dense development around regional transit hubs and frequent transit stops in concert with Rhode Island's Transit Forward 2040 Master Plan. Rep. Leonela Felix (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket) is sponsoring similar legislation ([2023-H 6084](#)) in the House as part of Speaker of the House K. Joseph Shekarchi's (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) 14-bill housing package.

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▪ **Shekarchi, Ruggerio, cut ribbon for Breeze Airlines' new operations base**

Speaker of the House K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) and Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) joined Breeze Airways Chief Operations Officer Mike Wuerger, Gov. Daniel McKee, and state and local officials to celebrate Breeze Airways' inaugural day as a base of operations at Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport. With this launch, Breeze Airways has completed its initial hiring and expects to expand to as many as 250 full time jobs, including pilots, flight crews, support staff and maintenance personnel to sustain up to a total of 20 nonstop routes.

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