

April 28, 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>



- **House passes Kazarian-sponsored Equality in Abortion Coverage Act**
The House of Representatives passed the Equality in Abortion Coverage Act, sponsored by Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence, Pawtucket). The legislation ([2023-H 5006](#)) would ensure that individuals on Medicaid and state health insurance plans have coverage for abortion procedures. The bill now heads to the Senate, where Sen. Bridget G. Valverde (D-Dist. 35, North Kingstown, East Greenwich, South Kingstown) has introduced the legislation ([2023-S 0032](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **House passes Alzate bill to turn commercial buildings into housing**
The House of Representatives passed legislation ([2023-H 6090A](#)) introduced by Rep. Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket, Central Falls) that would make it easier to convert commercial structures such as hospitals or mills into housing. The bill is part of House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi's (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) 14-bill package of legislation to address Rhode Island's housing crisis. The bill would allow, as a permitted use, the adaptive reuse of commercial structures, such as mills, factories, hospitals, malls, churches and schools, into high density residential developments without the need to go before a municipal planning board for a zone change. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.
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- **House passes Felix bill to promote transit-oriented development**
The House of Representatives passed a bill ([2023-H 6084A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Leonela Felix (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket) to promote the construction of housing units

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near transportation hubs such as the Pawtucket/Central Falls train station. The legislation is part of a 14-bill package of legislation to address Rhode Island's housing crisis put forward by House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick). Sen. Meghan Kallman (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, Providence) has related legislation ([2023-S 8000](#)) in the Senate.

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▪ **Senate OKs extension of tax credit for musical and theater tours launched in R.I.**

The Senate approved legislation sponsored by Senate President Pro Tempore Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick) to extend the state's existing musical and theater production tax credit program to national tours that skip Broadway and launch right from Rhode Island. It also extends the sunset date on the program from 2024 to 2027. The legislation ([2023-S 0464](#)) now heads to the House, where Rep. Lauren H. Carson (D-Dist. 75, Newport) is sponsoring identical legislation ([2023-H 5801](#)).

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▪ **Sen. Kallman sponsoring bill to ban 'forever chemicals'**

Sen. Meghan Kallman (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, Providence) is sponsoring legislation to ban per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). These so-called "forever chemicals" have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s and have been shown to have detrimental health effects, especially for pregnant women and children. The legislation ([2023-S 0016](#)) would ban all uses of almost all PFAS in Rhode Island by December 31, 2032. Representative Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown) has introduced companion legislation ([2023-H 5673](#)) in the House.

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▪ **Legislators, Attorney General announce bills to end lead poisoning in R.I.**

Legislative leaders, alongside Attorney General Peter F. Neronha, announced a package of bills aimed at drastically reducing childhood lead poisoning in Rhode Island. The three proposed bills mark a crucial step in eradicating childhood lead poisoning by ensuring compliance with existing laws.

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▪ **Senate President Ruggerio, Rep. Costantino introduce iGaming legislation**

Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) and Rep. Gregory J. Costantino (D-Dist. 44, Lincoln, Smithfield, Johnston) introduced legislation ([2023-S 0948](#), [2023-H 6348](#)) to permit online casino gaming. The legislation, requested by Bally's Corporation, seeks to enhance state revenue and better position the state's casinos in the competitive New England gaming market.

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▪ **McEntee urges support to expand Crime Victims Compensation Program**

Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett) was joined by General Treasurer James DiOSSa, Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos and Secretary of State Gregg Amore to advocate for legislation ([2023-H 5977](#)) to increase the funding pool for the Treasury's Crime Victims Compensation Program. The legislation would add a \$2 fine to traffic violations in Rhode Island, would permit program funds to be used

to ensure victim safety at home, and would allow victims to submit a medical report in lieu of a police report as part of their compensation application for certain crimes. Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown) has introduced the legislation ([2023-S 0887](#)) in the Senate.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **In wake of Exeter forest fire, Rep. Cotter bill seeks safer forest management**
Saying the 700-acre forest fire that raged in Exeter two weeks ago is evidence that Rhode Island needs to make forest stewardship a higher priority, Rep. Megan Cotter (D-Dist. 39, Exeter, Richmond, Hopkinton) introduced legislation ([2023-H 6342](#)) to create a commission that would help the state determine the best action for improving forest management.
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- **Sen. Miller, Rep. Baginski honored by Mental Health Association of R.I.**
At an event to kick off its “May is Mental Health Month” campaign, the Mental Health Association of Rhode Island honored Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) and Rep. Jacquelyn Baginski (D-Dist. 17, Cranston) as the organization’s Legislators of the Year for their sponsorship of legislation ([2022-S 2069A](#), [2022-H 7858](#)) last session to establish certified community behavioral health clinics in the state.
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