

May 7, 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 passes minimum wage bill**

The House approved legislation ([2021-H 5130A](#)) introduced by Rep. David A. Bennett (D-Dist. 20, Warwick, Cranston) to increase Rhode Island's minimum wage from \$11.50 to \$15 over a four-year period. The bill now goes to the Senate, which has approved companion legislation ([2021-S 0001aa](#)) sponsored by Sen. Ana B. Quezada (D-Dist. 2, Providence). The House also passed a separate measure ([2021-H 5851](#)) sponsored by House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) to repeal a law that allows employers to pay workers with disabilities below the minimum wage.

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- **Senate passes bills to reduce plastic waste in Rhode Island**

The Senate passed legislation to curtail plastic waste, including the Plastic Waste Reduction Act ([2021-S 0037](#)) introduced by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence), which would reduce the use of plastic bags by retail establishments. Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, Narragansett, South Kingstown) introduced companion legislation ([2021-H 5358](#)) in the House. The Senate also passed legislation ([2021-S 0155](#)) introduced by Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) that would prohibit a food service establishment from providing a consumer with a single-use plastic straw, unless the consumer requests such a straw. Rep. David A. Bennett (D-Dist. 20, Warwick, Cranston) has the companion bill ([2021-H 5131](#)) in the House.

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

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

More...

- **House passes legislation setting minimum nursing home staffing standards**
The House of Representatives passed legislation ([2021-H 5012Aaa](#)) introduced by Rep. Scott A. Slater (D-Dist. 10, Providence) that sets minimum staffing standards for nursing home care. The bill is meant to address an ongoing crisis in nursing home staffing that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Senate has passed a companion bill ([2021-S 0002](#)) introduced by Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence).
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- **House approves legislation making R.I. Promise program permanent**
The House passed legislation ([2021-H 5224](#)) sponsored by House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) to permanently enact the Rhode Island Promise program, which provides up to two years of free tuition for eligible Rhode Islanders at the Community College of Rhode Island. The measure now moves to the Senate, which has approved companion legislation ([2021-S 0079](#)) introduced by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence).
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- **Senate OKs bill requiring insurance, Medicaid coverage of doula services**
The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0484](#)) introduced by Sen. Ana B. Quezada (D-Dist. 2, Providence) that would make doula services eligible for reimbursement through private insurance and Medicaid programs. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives, where similar legislation ([2021-H 5929](#)) has been introduced by Rep. Marcia Ranglin-Vassell (D-Dist. 5, Providence).
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- **Senate approves Archambault legislation to protect vulnerable road users**
The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0318A](#)) introduced by Sen. Stephen R. Archambault (D-Dist. 22, Smithfield, North Providence, Johnston) that would provide for specific fines and sanctions to operators of motor vehicles who fail to exercise due care to avoid colliding with a vulnerable road user, such as pedestrians and cyclists, causing injury, serious injury, or death to the vulnerable road user. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives, which has passed similar legislation ([2021-H 5093](#)) introduced by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston).
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- **Senate OKs bill to redefine felonies, misdemeanors and petty misdemeanors**
The Senate passed legislation introduced by Senate Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) that revises the state's definitions of felonies, misdemeanors and petty misdemeanors. The bill ([2021-S 0518aa](#)) is part of ongoing efforts to overhaul the state's criminal justice system using a "justice reinvestment" approach, designed to identify new ways to relieve pressures on the correctional system, promote diversion and rehabilitation, and increase public safety. The measure now moves to the House for consideration, where similar legislation ([2021-H 5312](#)) has been introduced by Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, Narragansett, South Kingstown).
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- **House OKs bill that would ban gender discrimination in health insurance**
The House of Representatives passed legislation ([2021-H 5763](#)) introduced by Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence) that would ban health insurers from utilizing the discriminatory practice known as gender rating, or routinely charging women and men different premiums for individual insurance. The Senate has passed similar legislation ([2021-S 0003](#)) introduced by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham).
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- **House OKs Donovan bill to ban intentional release of balloons**
The House passed legislation ([2021-H 5376A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Susan R. Donovan (D-Dist. 69, Bristol, Portsmouth) to protect the environment and wildlife by prohibiting the intentional, simultaneous release of 10 or more balloons into the air. The bill will now be sent to the Senate, where Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2021-S 0038](#)).
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- **House Finance Committee approves bill strengthening IGT/Bally's agreement**
The House Finance Committee approved amended legislation ([2021-H 5223A](#)) sponsored by House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) to strengthen the agreement between the State of Rhode Island and IGT and Twin River, now Bally's Corporation. The bill is an economic development investment of more than \$250 million to preserve and enhance Rhode Island's third largest source of revenue. The Senate bill ([2021-S 0040](#)), sponsored by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) is also expected to be amended to match.
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