

May 8, 2026

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>



- **Shekarchi steps down; Blazejewski elected speaker; Kazarian Majority Leader**
House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) announced he would step down from leadership as he seeks an appointment to the Supreme Court. The House of Representatives elected Rep. Christopher R. Blazejewski (D-Dist. 2, Providence), who previously served as majority leader, as its new speaker. Democrats elevated Rep. Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence, Pawtucket) from majority whip to majority leader. Former Speaker Shekarchi, who had led the House since January 2021, will continue to serve as a member of the House.
[Click here to see Shekarchi release.](#)
[Click here to see Blazejewski release.](#)
[Click here to see Kazarian release.](#)
- **House, Senate pass bill to allow bars to stay open late during World Cup**
The House and Senate each passed legislation ([2026-H 8009A](#), [2026-S 2627A](#)) introduced by Rep. Joshua J. Giraldo (D-Dist. 56, Central Falls) and Sen. Matthew L. LaMountain (D-Dist. 31, Warwick, Cranston) respectively that would allow, but not require, local licensing authorities to grant extended indoor service hours to bars and restaurants to stay open later during 2026 World Cup games. Each bill now moves to the other chamber for consideration.
[Click here to see Giraldo release.](#)
[Click here to see LaMountain release.](#)
- **Senate OKs bill banning deed restrictions that block new grocery stores**
The Senate approved legislation ([2026-S 2644](#)) sponsored by Sens. Melissa Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) and Brian J. Thompson (D-Dist. 20,

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Woonsocket, Cumberland) to prohibit restrictive covenants that prevent grocery stores from occupying a particular property. Large supermarket chains often stifle competitors and create “food deserts” when they add restrictive covenants to deeds upon closing a store and selling the property. The bill, which is included in the Fair Price Grocery Agenda backed by Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos, now goes to the House, where Rep. Stephen M. Casey (D-Dist. 50, Woonsocket) is sponsoring a companion bill ([2026-H 8106](#)).

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

▪ **Senate OKs Lawson bill to extend waivers, plates to more disabled veterans**

The Senate approved legislation ([2026-S 2418](#)) introduced by Senate President Valarie J. Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) to expand the eligibility for disabled veterans to receive disabled veterans license plates and have their vehicle registration and license fees waived. The bill now goes the House, where Rep. Jenni A. Furtado (D-Dist. 64, East Providence, Pawtucket) has introduced companion legislation ([2026-H 7096](#)).

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▪ **Senate approves Ciccone bill to support employee-owned businesses**

The Senate approved legislation ([2026-S 2922](#)) introduced by Majority Leader Frank A. Ciccone III (D-Dist. 7, Providence, Johnston) that would establish the Rhode Island Center for Employee Ownership (RICEO) to facilitate businesses in transitioning to an employee-owned business model. The bill now heads to the House for consideration, where Rep. Grace Diaz (D-Dist. 11, Providence) has introduced the legislation ([2026-H 7570](#)).

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▪ **Senate approves Acosta bill to establish Central Falls Stabilization Fund**

The Senate approved legislation sponsored by Sen. Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) that would establish the Central Falls Stabilization Fund in anticipation of Central Falls regaining local control of its schools. The legislation ([2026-S 3214](#)) would eliminate the Central Falls School District Board of Trustees; in effect bringing an end to the longest state takeover of a local school district in the history of the United States. The legislation now heads to the House for consideration, where Rep. Joshua J. Giraldo (D-Dist. 56, Central Falls) has introduced the bill ([2026-H 8429](#)).

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

▪ **Senate approves Zurier bill to protect customers’ genetic privacy**

The Senate approved legislation ([2026-S 2203](#)) introduced by Sen. Samuel D. Zurier (D-Dist. 3, Providence) to ensure that Rhode Island consumers retain control of their genetic data. The bill now heads to the House, where companion legislation ([2026-H 7639](#)) from Rep. Edith H. Ajello (D-Dist. 1, Providence) passed April 28.

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▪ **Senate OKs Patalano bill to allow Guard members to gift their tuition benefits**

The Senate voted to approve legislation ([2026-S 2420](#)) sponsored by Sen. Todd M. Patalano (D-Dist. 26, Cranston) to allow National Guard members to allocate their state tuition assistance benefits to an immediate family member. The bill now moves

to the House for consideration.

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▪ **Senate OKs Mack bill to establish warming, cooling center procedures**

The Senate approved legislation ([2026-S 2264](#)) introduced by Sen. Tiara Mack (D-Dist. 6, Providence) that would create warming and cooling center alerts to trigger municipal procedures during extreme heat or cold to help at-risk individuals. The bill now heads to the House, where Rep. Teresa A. Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett) has introduced similar legislation ([2026-H 7987](#)).

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▪ **Senate passes Felag bills that help, support and honor service members**

The Senate passed five bills sponsored by Sen. Walter S. Felag Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton), chairman of the Senate Special Legislation and Veterans' Affairs Committee, that help, support and honor Rhode Island's service members. The first ([2026-S 2414](#)) would allow disabled veterans' license plates to be transferred to spouses. The second ([2026-S 2184](#)) would remove the fee for registration and plate transfer for a Distinguished Service Cross registration plate. The third ([2026-S 2177](#)) would establish the Rhode Island Orange Heart Medal. The fourth ([2026-S 2756](#)) would permit military-connected students to enroll by remote registration upon presentation of military orders confirming that the parent or guardian shall be stationed in Rhode Island. The fifth ([2026-S 2996](#)) would create three new state awards to recognize Rhode Island military and National Guard members. The bills now head to the House, where Rep. Samuel A. Azzinaro (D-Dist. 37, Westerly), chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee has introduced the last four ([2026-H 7097](#), [2026-H 7094](#), [2026-H 8125](#), [2026-H 8123](#)).

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

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-30-

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