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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 Casey, Corvese bills to improve housing development**

The House approved two bills that are part of Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi's (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) package of legislation to address Rhode Island's housing crisis. The first ([2023-H 6085A](#)), which was introduced by Rep. Stephen M. Casey (D-Dist. 50, Woonsocket), would require municipalities to update their comprehensive plan every five years and prohibit plans over 12 years old from being used to deny zoning changes. A second bill ([2023-H 6086A](#)), introduced by Rep. Arthur Corvese (D-Dist. 55, North Providence), standardizes and updates the way notice is provided for all land use permitting. Both bills now head to the Senate for consideration.

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

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

- **Senate approves bill enacting Obamacare consumer protections in state law**

The Senate approved legislation sponsored by Senate 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 ([2023-S 0023a](#)) would provide Rhode Islanders with permanent protections, even if the federal law is ever weakened or repealed. The bill will now go to the House, where Rep. June S. Speakman is sponsoring companion legislation ([2023-H 5426](#)).

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- **House approves bill to regulate e-bikes in RI**

The House passed legislation sponsored by Rep. Rebecca Kislak (D-Dist. 4, Providence) to establish the rules of the road for electric bikes. The legislation ([2023-](#)

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[H 5220](#)) adopts standards that have been passed in 39 other states to regulate the rapidly growing use of e-bikes on roads and bike paths. The bill updates Rhode Island law to reflect modern electric bicycles and establishes that they are to be considered bicycles, not motor vehicles, in the eyes of the law. The bill now goes to the Senate, where Sen. Dawn Euer (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2023-S 0326](#)).

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▪ **Senate OKs bills to improve treatment for substance use, mental health**

The Senate passed two bills sponsored by Senate Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) to improve treatment for those with substance use and mental health disorders. The first bill ([2023-S 0027](#)) would require that health plans cover residential or inpatient behavioral health treatment, and would prohibit prior authorization requirements for such treatment. The second ([2023-S 0025](#)) would require the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals to propose revisions to laws on alcoholism and emergency commitment for drug intoxication, including updates and revisions of statutory language and evidence-based best practices. Both bills now go to the House.

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▪ **House OKs Serpa bill allowing voters to automatically disaffiliate after voting**

The House of Representatives passed legislation ([2023-H 5612](#)) introduced by Rep. Patricia A. Serpa (D-Dist. 27, West Warwick, Coventry), which would make party disaffiliation automatic for independent voters who choose to participate in primary elections. The measure now moves to the Senate, where similar legislation ([2023-S 0115](#)) has been introduced by Sen. Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-Dist. 33, Coventry, West Greenwich).

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▪ **Senate OKs Acosta bill to include appropriate disability language in state laws**

The Senate passed legislation ([2023-S 0722A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) that would implement appropriate disability language within Rhode Island's laws. The act would replace terms such as "developmental disability," "mentally retarded" or "drug abusers" used in the General Laws, with the words, "intellectual or developmental disability" or "persons with substance use disorders." The bill now heads to the House for consideration where Rep. Joshua J. Giraldo (D-Dist. 56, Central Falls) has introduced the legislation ([2023-H 5755](#)).

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▪ **House passes Slater bill allowing cannabis advertisements**

The House passed legislation ([2023-H 5829](#)) sponsored by Rep. Scott A. Slater (D-Dist. 10, Providence) that would allow the state's cannabis dispensaries to advertise their products. Under current law, cannabis businesses cannot advertise in Rhode Island. The bill would permit the Office of Cannabis Regulation to provide forms, procedures and requirements with respect to the advertising of cannabis products. The legislation now heads to the Senate for consideration.

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- **Business owners, legislators highlight benefits of tangible tax relief**
Sen. Melissa A. Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) and Rep. Brandon T. Voas (D-Dist. 57, Cumberland, Central Falls) met with local leaders and members of the business community to highlight their legislation ([2023-S 0928](#), [2023-H 6333](#)) that would exempt the first \$100,000 of tangible property from the tangible personal property tax. The tax is paid by businesses on property, other than real estate, that has value by itself, such as computer equipment, furnishings and fixtures.
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- **Lawson bill would expand parental, caregiving leave**
Sen. Valarie Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) is sponsoring legislation ([2023-S 0139](#)) to expand Rhode Island's Temporary Caregiver Insurance program from six weeks to 12. That would bring Rhode Island in line with other states and allow new parents more time for parental leave and caregivers more time to care for a critically ill family member. It would also broaden the definition of critically ill family members that allow someone to be eligible by including grandchild, sibling and care recipient, meaning an individual for whom the worker is a primary caretaker. Similar legislation ([2023-H 5781](#)) has been introduced in the House by Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence, Pawtucket).
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- **After ACI suicides, Felix, Acosta, advocates rally to reform solitary confinement**
After three high-profile deaths at the Adult Correctional Institutions in Cranston, Sen. Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) and Rep. Leonela Felix (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket) were joined by survivors of solitary confinement, advocates and the family of one of the deceased to draw attention to the need for reform. They are sponsoring a bill ([2023-S 0617](#), [2023-H 6161](#)) to establish an oversight committee to monitor the use of solitary confinement, lay out clear guidelines for when solitary confinement could be used, and ban the use of solitary confinement for more than 22 hours each day (which the United Nations defines as torture).
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