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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>



- **Equality in Abortion Coverage Act becomes law**

The General Assembly passed and Gov. Dan McKee signed into law the Equality in Abortion Coverage Act ([2023-S 0032](#), [2023-H 5006](#)) sponsored by Sen. Bridget Valverde (D-Dist. 35, East Greenwich, North Kingstown, South Kingstown) and House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence, Pawtucket). The law will provide insurance coverage for abortion care to individuals on Medicaid as well as state employees.

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- **Assembly passes legislation reducing driving privilege card fees**

The General Assembly passed legislation ([2023-H 5780](#), [2023-S 0751](#)) introduced by Rep. Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket, Central Falls) and Sen. Robert Britto (D-Dist. 18, East Providence, Pawtucket) that reduces the fee for an original driver privilege card. The legislation reduces the fee from \$50 to \$25 in order to bring the fee in line with the cost charged for renewing a driver's license and would take effect on July 1. The measure now moves to the governor's desk.

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- **House OKs bills amending housing act, easing process of building ADUs**

The House of Representatives passed two bills addressing the state's housing crisis. The first ([2023-H6081A](#)), sponsored by Speaker of the House K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick), would amend the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act to modify and clarify the procedure for review of applications to build housing. The second ([2023-H 6082Aaa](#)), sponsored by Rep. June Speakman (D-Dist. 68, Warren, Bristol), would provide homeowners the right to develop an accessory dwelling unit

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within the existing footprint of their structures or on any lot larger than 20,000 square feet. Both measures now move to the Senate for consideration

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

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

- **Senate OKs bill requiring insurance coverage for diagnosing, treating infertility**
 The Senate passed legislation ([2023-S 0107](#)) sponsored by Sen. Sandra Cano (D-Dist. 8, Pawtucket) that would mandate that all insurance contracts, plans or policies provide coverage for the expense of diagnosing and treating infertility, including preimplantation genetic diagnosis in conjunction with in vitro fertilization. The bill now heads to the House, where Rep. Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket) has introduced the legislation ([2023-H 5351](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate passes bills requiring universal healthy free school meals**
 The Senate passed two bills sponsored by Sen. Sandra Cano (D-Dist. 8, Pawtucket) and Sen. Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) that would require universal healthy free school meals at the state's public schools. Senator Cano's bill ([2023-S 0071](#)) would require free meals to be provided for all elementary and secondary students attending public schools, to the extent state and federal funds are available. Senator Acosta's bill ([2023-S 0071](#)) would require free breakfast and lunch be provided for all students. Both bills now move to the House for consideration, where Rep. Justine A. Caldwell (D-Dist. 30, East Greenwich, West Greenwich) has introduced a bill ([2023-H 56396](#)) similar to Senator Cano's.
[Click here to see news release](#)
- **House OKs bill that would increase penalties for theft of catalytic converters**
 The House of Representatives passed legislation ([2023-H 5841aa](#)) introduced by Rep. Joseph J. Solomon Jr. (D-Dist. 22, Warwick) that would increase the penalties for thefts of catalytic converters. It would mandate a bill of sale, eliminate cash payments and require the attorney general to suspend the license of any violator of the law. A conviction under this law would be a felony subject to fine and imprisonment.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Legislation would prohibit incarceration of children under 14**
 Sen. Bridget Valverde (D-Dist. 35, East Greenwich, North Kingstown, South Kingstown) and Rep. Rebecca M. Kislak, (D-Dist. 4, Providence) have introduced legislation ([2023-H 5359](#), [2023-S 0344](#)) that would prohibit Family Court from detaining or committing any juvenile under the age of 14 years to the training school for any offense, with exceptions for murder, first-degree sexual assault or an attempt to commit either.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Morales bill would establish a statewide 'Medicare for All' healthcare system**
 Rep. David Morales (D-Dist. 7, Providence) has introduced legislation to establish a statewide universal, comprehensive single-payer health care program. The bill ([2023-H 6339](#)) would create a "Medicare-for-all" style single-payer program that would replace multiple "middlemen" insurers with a single coverage provider, the Rhode Island Comprehensive Health Insurance Program.

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- **Boylan introduces bill to study school lockdowns, safety drills**
Rep. Jennifer Smith Boylan (D-Dist. 66, Barrington, East Providence) has introduced a resolution ([2023-H 6422](#)) that would create a commission to study lockdowns, fire drills and the associated mental health supports for students. The commission would be made up of public safety officials, teachers, students, mental health professionals and legislators. It would be tasked with answering complex questions such as whether and when students should be encouraged to evacuate during lockdown events, whether advanced notice should be provided to students and/or parents prior to a lockdown drill and whether the frequency of drills should be changed.
[Click here to see press release.](#)
- **Lawson, Kazarian seek state funding for East Providence housing development**
Sen. Valarie Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) and Rep. Katherine Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence, Pawtucket) are sponsoring a joint resolution ([2023-S 0985](#), [2023-H 6297](#)) to provide state funding for a proposed housing project in East Providence. The project, called the Taunton Avenue Collaborative, would provide 160 new apartments in a vibrant and diverse community for extremely low-income households, youth aging out of foster care and low- to moderate-income families. Residents would have access to a variety of supports from area nonprofits.
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