



Rhode Island General Assembly



NEWS

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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 approves three housing bills; part of Speaker's housing package**
The House passed three bills that are 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 first bill ([2023-H 6058A](#)), sponsored by Rep. Marvin L. Abney (D-Dist. 73, Newport, Middletown), would allow developers to build more units per acre if a certain percentage of those units are set aside for low- and moderate-income housing. The second bill ([2023-H 6059A](#)), sponsored by Rep. Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown), would amend zoning standards and make changes to dimensional variance standards to spur more housing development in the state. The third bill ([2023-H 6061Aaa](#)), also sponsored by Representative Craven, would amend subdivision and land development permits and processes to provide more predictability and to standardize processes throughout the state. All three bills now head to the Senate for consideration.
[Click here to see Abney release.](#)
[Click here to see Craven release.](#)
- **House passes McGaw bill requiring no-cost EpiPen coverage**
The House approved legislation sponsored by Rep. Michelle McGaw (D-Dist. 71, Portsmouth, Tiverton, Little Compton) to require health insurers in Rhode Island to cover the full cost of life-saving epinephrine injectors, commonly known by the brand name EpiPen. The legislation ([2023-H 5176A](#)), which now goes to the Senate, is aimed

at preventing costs from being an obstacle to those whose lives depend on the device for management of anaphylactic reactions.

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

- **Senate OKs legislation to include climate change in economic planning**

The Senate unanimously approved legislation ([2023-S 0062](#)) sponsored by Sen. Pamela J. Lauria (D-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence) to add data about climate change, sea level rise and coastal resiliency to the list of matters that should be considered by the Rhode Island Commerce and the Division of Planning as part of the creation of the state's long-term economic development vision and policy and strategic planning.

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

- **House approves bill to ensure appointment of CRMC hearing officers**

The House approved legislation sponsored by Rep. Jason Knight (D-Dist. 67, Barrington, Warren) to enable the Coastal Resources Management Council's executive director to ensure the regulatory agency has the professional staff it needs to make sound determinations on coastal development proposals. The legislation ([2023-H 5779A](#)), which now goes to the Senate, empowers CRMC's executive director to hire a hearing officer for the agency if the position is left vacant for 90 days or more.

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

- **Senate passes measure to create special education ombud**

The Senate approved legislation sponsored by Sen. Melissa A. Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) to help families navigate challenges in getting special educational needs met at school. The bill ([2023-S 0063](#)) creates an independent ombud office for special education to ensure school districts meet the standards required to comply with individualized education programs for students with disabilities. The legislation now goes to the House, where Rep. Lauren H. Carson (D-Dist. 75, Newport) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2023-H 5166](#)).

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

- **Senate OKs bill requiring driver education to include dangers of driving high**

The Senate passed legislation ([2023-S 0667](#)) introduced by Sen. David P. Tikoian (D-Dist. 22, Smithfield, Lincoln, North Providence) that would require driver education courses to include a program about the dangers of driving under the influence of marijuana. The measure now moves to the House, where similar legislation ([2023-H 5768](#)) has been introduced by Rep. Julie Casimiro (D-Dist. 31, North Kingstown, Exeter).

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

- **House OKs bill allowing low-speed vehicles on R.I. roads**

The House approved legislation sponsored by Rep. Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown) to establish laws providing for the use of electric low-speed vehicles in Rhode Island. The bill ([2023-H 5457A](#)) would allow electric low-speed vehicles with a top speed of 20 to 25 miles per hour to be registered and driven on

roads with speed limits that do not exceed 35 miles per hour. The vehicles — which are allowed in 47 other states — are a green transportation option for short trips, such as local delivery and use for college campuses, hospitality and tourism. The legislation now goes to the Senate, where Sen. Louis P. DiPalma (D-Dist. 12, Middletown, Little Compton, Newport, Tiverton) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2023-S 0419](#)). [Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Senate passes Mack legislation establishing Juneteenth as state holiday**

The Senate approved legislation ([2023-S 0444](#)) sponsored by Sen. Tiara Mack (D-Dist. 6, Providence) that would establish Juneteenth National Freedom Day as a state holiday, to be held every year on June 19. The federal government first recognized Juneteenth as a federal holiday in 2021. The bill now heads to the House for consideration where Rep. Brianna E. Henries (D-Dist. 64, East Providence, Pawtucket) has introduced the legislation ([2023-H 5380](#)). [Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Speaker Shekarchi introduces legislation to create life science hub**

Speaker of the House K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) introduced legislation to create a life science hub in Rhode Island. The bill ([2023-H 6426](#)) would create a new quasi-public entity known as the Rhode Island Life Sciences Hub (RILSH), which would evaluate and potentially invest in Rhode Island-based companies in the life sciences sector that meet vigorous eligibility criteria and promote economic growth and workforce development. RILSH would aim to strengthen the life science sector in Rhode Island and encourage collaboration and innovation among public, private and academic institutions. [Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Senators Gu and Ujifusa organize AAPI celebration at State House**

Sen. Linda Ujifusa (D-Dist. 11, Portsmouth, Bristol) and Sen. Victoria Gu (D-Dist. 38, Charlestown, Westerly, South Kingstown), the first Asian Americans elected to the Rhode Island state legislature, gathered community leaders from across the state for a celebration of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month. The event was emceed by Newport Mayor Xaykham Khamsyvong, who is Lao-American, and the first Asian American mayor of that city. There were performances by musicians and dancers from across the Rhode Island Asian American Pacific Islander community. [Click here to see news release.](#)