

June 16, 2023

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>



- **2024 state budget bill enacted**

The 2024 state budget bill ([2023-H 5200Aaa](#)) was approved by the General Assembly and signed into law. The \$14 billion budget commits significant new funding toward addressing the housing crisis and homelessness, supports business development and makes education funding more equitable while limiting the use of one-time revenue to one-time expenditures. It sets aside more money for the future in a supplemental rainy day fund, establishes a tax exemption that wipes out the tangible tax for 75% of Rhode Island businesses and raises the earned income tax credit.

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- **Assembly approves Speaker Shekarchi's housing package**

The General Assembly this year supported House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi's effort to address Rhode Island's housing crisis by speeding housing production, approving 13 of the 14 bills in the package of housing legislation he backed this session. The bills, sponsored by Speaker Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) and other legislators, are headed to the governor.

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- **Bill clarifying public shoreline access clears Assembly**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2023-H 5174A](#), [2023-S 0417A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown) and Sen. Mark P. McKenney (D-Dist. 30, Warwick) to establish that the public area of the shoreline is 10 feet landward of the recognizable high tide line. The bill, which now goes to the governor, is intended to clarify the Ocean State's constitutionally protected public shoreline rights by finally establishing a clear delineation of where

More...

the public area of the shoreline ends and private property begins.

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- **Assembly OKs bill adding Affordable Care Act consumer protections to R.I. law**  
Lawmakers approved legislation sponsored by Senate Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Warwick) and Rep. June S. Speakman (D-Dist. 68, Warren, Bristol) to enact many of the consumer-protection elements of the federal Affordable Care Act — commonly called “Obamacare” — into state law. The legislation ([2023-S 0023B](#), [2023-H 5426A](#)), which now goes to the governor, would provide Rhode Islanders with permanent protections, even if the federal law is ever weakened or repealed.

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- **Legislators approve measure establishing Juneteenth as state holiday**  
Rhode Island will join the federal government next year in recognizing Juneteenth as an official holiday under legislation sponsored by Rep. Brianna E. Henries (D-Dist. 64, East Providence, Pawtucket) and Sen. Tiara Mack (D-Dist. 6, Providence) and approved by the Assembly. The legislation ([2023-S 0444A](#), [2023-H 5380A](#)), which now goes to the governor, will establish Juneteenth National Freedom Day as a state holiday celebrated annually on June 19 to commemorate the emancipation of slaves in states that left the union.

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- **General Assembly approves iGaming at Bally’s**  
The General Assembly passed legislation ([2023-S 0948B](#), [2023-H 6348A](#)) introduced by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) and Rep. Gregory J. Costantino (D-Dist. 44, Lincoln, Smithfield, Johnston) to provide a new means of accessing existing table game offerings at Bally’s Twin River Casino in Lincoln. The legislation enables Rhode Islanders 21 and over to access existing table games remotely, via a computer or a mobile app. Players would have to be located within the state of Rhode Island.

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- **Legislator OK ban on foam takeout containers in restaurants**  
The General Assembly approved legislation ([2023-H 5090A](#), [2023-S 0014B](#)), sponsored by Rep. David A. Bennett (D-Dist. 20, Warwick, Cranston) and Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence), to ban food service establishments from processing, preparing, selling or providing food or beverages in disposable food containers made in whole or in part of polystyrene foam, or from providing beverage stirrers made from plastic. The bills head to the governor’s desk for his signature.

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- **General Assembly charts future of solar development**  
The General Assembly has passed a comprehensive plan for the future of solar development in Rhode Island. The bill ([2023-S 0684A](#), [2023-H 5853A](#)), sponsored by Sen. Alana DiMario (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown) and Rep. June Speakman (D-Dist. 68, Warren, Bristol), will reform the state’s net metering and renewable energy growth programs to expand solar development while protecting

forests, creating well-paying jobs and stabilizing costs for ratepayers. The bills head to the governor's desk for his signature.

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▪ **Legislation to toughen wage theft penalties passes Assembly**

The General Assembly passed a bill by Sen. Meghan Kallman (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, Providence) and Rep. Robert E. Craven (D-Dist. 32, North Kingstown) to toughen penalties for wage theft ([2023-S 1079Aaa](#), [2023-H 5902Aaa](#)). The bill would make knowingly and willfully committing wage theft of more than \$1,500 a felony, punishable by fines and incarceration. For willful wage theft of over \$10,000, the penalty could be up to 10 years in prison. The bills head to the governor's desk for his signature.

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• **Assembly passes several lead-poisoning prevention bills**

The General Assembly passed several pieces of legislation that address the dangers of lead. One bill ([2023-S 0002B](#), [2023-H 5007A](#)) addresses lead pipes in Rhode Island's water supply system. Another ([2023-S 0656A](#), [2023-H 5946A](#)) requires lead hazard mitigation for pre-1978 rental dwelling units. Three other bills ([2023-S 0804aa](#), [2023-H 6239A](#), [2023-S 0729aa](#), [2023-H 6238A](#), [2023-S 0739](#), [2023-H 6201](#)) will strengthen enforcement of lead-safety laws for tenants by requiring landlords to register their compliance with the state, empower tenants to pay rent into an escrow if landlords are not in compliance with lead-safety laws, and allow tenants to seek treble damages if a child is poisoned by a landlord's negligence. All the bills now head to the governor for consideration.

[Click here to see Ruggerio and O'Brien release.](#)

[Click here to see Acosta and Voas release.](#)

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-30-

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