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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>



- **Assembly approves 2023 state budget bill**

The General Assembly approved a \$13.6 billion state budget for the 2023 fiscal year that provides targeted taxpayer relief and directs spending of the remainder of the state's American Rescue Act Plan (ARPA) funds to strengthening existing commitments. The bill includes raises for many health and service providers, eliminates the automobile excise tax a year earlier than scheduled, provides economic relief for families with children, retirees, veterans and the disabled and businesses and invests ARPA funds in housing, infrastructure, the blue economy and more. The budget bill ([2022-H 7123Aaa](#)) now goes to the governor, who plans to sign it Monday.

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- **Gun safety measures signed into law**

Gov. Daniel McKee has signed bills to ban large-capacity gun magazines ([2022-H 6614A](#), [2022-S 2653](#)), limit sales of guns and ammunition to adults over 21 years old ([2022-H 7457aa](#), [2022-S 2637A](#)), and penalize the open carrying of loaded rifles and shotguns in public ([2022-S 2825](#), [2022-H 7358A](#)). The large-capacity magazines law is sponsored by Senate Judiciary Chairwoman Cynthia A. Coyne (D-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence) and Rep. Justine Caldwell (D-Dist. 30, East Greenwich, West Greenwich), the purchase age law by Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence) and Rep. Teresa Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett), and the open carry law by Senate Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) and Rep. Leonela "Leo" Felix (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket).

[Click here to see large-capacity magazines release.](#)

More...

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

▪ **Assembly approves bills to help address housing crisis**

The General Assembly approved a package of 10 bills to address the state's housing crisis. The legislation was backed by House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) and Rep. June S. Speakman (D-Dist. 68, Warren, Bristol), chairwoman of the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Rhode Island Low and Moderate Income Housing Act. The bills aim to streamline development, provide more complete and timely information about housing, and help municipalities meet their affordable housing goals.

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▪ **Assembly approves bill to grant driving privileges to undocumented residents**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2022-S 2006Aaa](#), [2022-H 7939A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Frank A. Ciccone (D-Dist. 7, Providence, North Providence) and Rep. Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket) that allows the Division of Motor Vehicles to issue driving privileges to undocumented residents in the state.

Applicants must present proof of paying income taxes, two primary proof of identity documents and proof of insurance. Neither the permit nor card would be usable for federal or state identification or voting purposes. The legislation now heads to the governor's office for consideration.

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▪ **Assembly OKs bill to streamline applications for senior SNAP beneficiaries**

The General Assembly passed legislation ([2022-S 2317](#), [2022-H 7068](#)) introduced by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) and Rep. Kathleen A. Fogarty (D-Dist. 35, South Kingstown) that would make it easier for senior citizens to apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits by requiring the Department of Human Services to develop a plan to streamline the application, certification and recertification process. The measure now moves to the governor's office.

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▪ **Assembly approves bill seeking major offshore wind energy development**

Rhode Island will open the door to significantly more renewable energy for the state under legislation passed by the General Assembly seeking the development of 600 to 1,000 megawatts of new offshore wind capacity. The legislation ([2022-S 2583A](#), [2022-H 7971A](#)), sponsored by Sen. Dawn Euer (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) and Rep. Arthur Handy (D-Dist. 18, Cranston) at the request of Gov. Daniel McKee, will require Rhode Island's primary electric distributor to issue a market-competitive procurement for between 600 and 1,000 MW of newly-developed offshore wind capacity no later than Oct. 15.

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▪ **Assembly OKs bill to strengthen hospital merger review**

The General Assembly approved legislation sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) and House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) to strengthen the hospital merger review process in

Rhode Island. The legislation ([2022-S 2349](#), [2022-H 8343](#)), which now goes to the governor, would prohibit an expedited review when the combined hospitals after a merger would account for 20 percent or more of the hospitals in the state. It would also expand factors that must be taken into consideration.

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- **Assembly bans toxic chemicals from food packaging, sets water standards**
The General Assembly took steps to reduce Rhode Islanders' exposure to toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), toxic substances that are ubiquitous in consumer products for their oil-repelling properties. Lawmakers approved legislation ([2022-S 2298A](#), [2022-H 7233A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Walter S. Felag, Jr. (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton) and Rep. June S. Speakman (D-Dist. 68, Warren, Bristol) that would provide for the Department of Health to take action to establish maximum contaminate levels for PFAS in drinking water and set interim standards. They also approved legislation ([2022-H 7438A](#), [2022-S 2044A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown) and Sen. James A. Seveney (D-Dist. 11, Portsmouth, Bristol, Tiverton) prohibiting PFAS from food packaging beginning in 2024. The bill now goes to the governor.

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- **Assembly approves Plastic Waste Reduction Act**
The General Assembly approved Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) and Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee's (D-Dist. 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett) Plastic Waste Reduction Act ([2022-S 2446](#), [2022-H 7065A](#)), which is designed to reduce the use of plastic checkout bags by retail establishments by offering recyclable bag options and providing penalties for violations. Under the legislation, retail sales establishments would be prohibited from making available any single-use plastic checkout bag or any paper checkout bag that is not a recyclable paper bag or a paper carryout bag at restaurants. The legislation now heads to the governor's office for consideration.

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- **General Assembly passes child endangerment bill**
The General Assembly passed legislation ([2022-H 7807](#), [2022-S 2808](#)) introduced by Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett) and Sen. Leonidas P. Raptakis (D-Dist. 33, Coventry, East Greenwich, West Greenwich) that would establish felony penalties for guardians convicted of child endangerment. The bill would establish criminal penalties for a wanton or reckless act or omission of a parent, guardian or any other person who has custody or control of a child, where those acts or omissions result in substantial risk of serious bodily injury to the child or sexual abuse of a child in their care. The legislation now heads to the governor's office for consideration.

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