

June 25, 2021

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 approves 2022 state budget bill**

The House voted 64-10 to approve a \$13.1 billion state budget for the 2022 fiscal year that boosts key supports for vulnerable Rhode Islanders — particularly affordable housing — makes body cameras available for every uniformed police officer statewide, fully funds state aid to education and continues the phase-out of the automobile excise tax, without any broad-based tax increases. The bill ([2021-H 6122Aaa](#)), sponsored by House Finance Committee Chairman Marvin L. Abney (D-Dist. 73, Newport, Middletown) now goes to the Senate, which is expected to take it up next week.

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- **Budget bill allocates resources to address affordable housing**

The 2022 state budget bill ([2021-H 6122Aaa](#)) approved by the House and now before the Senate includes numerous initiatives to help address Rhode Island’s affordable housing crisis. The bill establishes the state’s first dedicated funding stream for affordable housing, funds a pilot program to create supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals, creates a “housing czar” within the Executive Office of Commerce to coordinate and facilitate housing production and creates an incentive program to assist municipalities in promoting housing production.

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- **RI Works recipients to get first benefits raise in 30 years in budget bill**

The budget bill ([2021-H 6122Aaa](#)) provides a 30-percent increase to the cash benefits provided through Rhode Island Works – the first such increase in three decades for the state’s cash assistance and work-readiness program for low-income families. It

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also allows the \$100 yearly clothing allowance for children to be paid for infants and toddlers, who are currently excluded. To improve parents' readiness for employment and job retention, it exempts income from work for six months when a parent starts a job, or until a household income exceeds 185 percent of the federal poverty line.

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▪ **Elder financial exploitation bill becomes law**

The General Assembly approved and the governor signed into law legislation ([2021-S 0264A](#), [2021-H 5642A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Cynthia A. Coyne (D-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence) and Rep. Joseph J. Solomon Jr. (D-Dist. 22, Warwick) to require financial institutions to report suspected financial exploitation of seniors to the Office of Healthy Aging, and authorizing them to temporarily hold transactions they suspect as such.

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▪ **General Assembly OKs bill to simplify process of marriage solemnization**

The General Assembly passed legislation ([2021-S 0014B](#), [2021-H 5034A](#)) introduced by Senate Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) and House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence) that would authorize the governor to designate any adult to solemnize a marriage within the state on a particular day and within a particular city or town.

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▪ **Legislature bans gender discrimination in health insurance premiums**

The General Assembly passed legislation ([2021-S 0003A](#), [2021-H 5763](#)) introduced by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) and House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence) that would ban health insurers from utilizing the discriminatory practice known as gender rating, or routinely charging women and men different premiums for individual insurance.

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▪ **Assembly passes bill requiring over-the-phone CPR operators on 911 staff**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-H 5629](#), [2021-S 0385aa](#)) introduced by House Deputy Majority Whip Mia Ackerman (D-Dist. 45, Cumberland, Lincoln) and Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence) that would improve over-the-phone CPR instructions by requiring the 911 system to certify and staff individuals trained in telecommunicator CPR.

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▪ **Assembly OKs bill allowing restaurants to continue selling drinks with take-out**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-S 0555Aaa](#), [2021-H 5105A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick) and Rep. Jacquelyn Baginski (D-Dist. 17, Cranston) to allow any Class B liquor license holders and brewpubs to sell certain amounts of beer, wine and mixed drinks with take-out food order through March 1, 2022. The bill applies only to take-out orders, not delivery.

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- **Senate passes bill to implement Transportation and Climate Initiative Program**
The Senate passed the Transportation Emission and Mobile (TEAM) Community Act ([2021-S 0872A](#)) introduced by Sen. Alana M. DiMario (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown) to implement the Transportation and Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P) in Rhode Island. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives, where similar legislation ([2021-H 6310](#)) has been introduced by Rep. Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown).
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- **Senate passes bill that grants driving privileges to undocumented residents**
The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0190Aaa](#)) sponsored by Sen. Frank A. Ciccone (D-Dist. 7, Providence, North Providence) that allows the Division of Motor Vehicles to issue driving privileges to undocumented residents in the state. Rep. Anastasia P. Williams (D-Dist. 9, Providence) has sponsored similar legislation ([2021-H 5305](#)) in the House.
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- **Senate passes legislation to legalize, tax, and regulate cannabis in Rhode Island**
The Senate approved legislation ([2021-S 0568A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) to legalize, tax and regulate cannabis. The bill creates a Cannabis Control Commission to oversee a competitive and accessible licensing structure that would generate tax revenue through the state sales tax, a special cannabis sales tax, and a local sales tax which is remitted back to the community where the point of sale occurred. The legislation legalizes the possession of up to one ounce of marijuana by individuals over the age of 21.
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