

July 2, 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>



- **General Assembly approves 2022 state budget bill**

The General Assembly approved 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 and does not rely on the \$1.1 billion in one-time federal American Rescue Plan funding for ongoing expenses. The bill ([2021-H 6122Aaa](#)), which now goes to the governor, fully funds state aid to education, does not include any broad-based tax increases and continues the scheduled phase-out of the automobile excise tax, which is set to be fully eliminated after the 2023 fiscal year.

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- **General Assembly passes package of gun-related legislation**

The General Assembly passed a package of three bills related to firearms. The Harold M. Metts School Safety Act of 2021 ([2021-S 0073](#), [2021-H 5555A](#)) sponsored by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) and House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence) would prohibit anyone, with certain exceptions, from bringing a firearm onto school property. Legislation ([2021-H 5386aa](#), [2021-S 416aa](#)) sponsored by Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) and Rep. Jason Knight (D-Dist. 67, Barrington, Warren) prohibits “straw purchases” — the purchase of a firearm on behalf of, or selling or transferring a firearm to someone is legally prohibited from possessing one. Legislation ([2021-S 5727A](#), [2021-S 0119A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Stephen M. Casey (D-Dist. 50, Woonsocket) and Senate Minority Whip Jessica de la

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Cruz (R-Dist. 23, North Smithfield, Burrillville, Glocester) requires the office of the attorney general to issue a report containing the total number of cases with respect to charges involving a firearm in all Rhode Island courts.

[Click here to see Metts Act release.](#)

[Click here to see straw purchases release.](#)

[Click here to see gun reporting release.](#)

▪ **Pay equity legislation passes General Assembly**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-S 0270A](#), [2021 H 5261A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Gayle L. Goldin (D-Dist. 3, Providence) and Rep. Susan R. Donovan (D-Dist. 69, Bristol, Portsmouth) to comprehensively address wage discrimination based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, age and country of origin. The bill, now headed to the governor, expands employee protections and the scope of the remedies available to employees who have experienced such discrimination.

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▪ **Legislators OK bills curbing plastic straws, banning intentional balloon releases**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-S 0155A](#), [2021-H 5131A](#)) sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) and House Environment and Natural Resources Committee Chairman David A. Bennett (D-Dist. 20, Warwick, Cranston) to prohibit food service establishments from providing single-use plastic straws unless requested by the consumer. Legislators also approved bills ([2021-H 5376Aaa](#), [2021-S 0038Aaa](#)) sponsored by Rep. Susan R. Donovan (D-Dist. 69, Bristol, Portsmouth) and Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) to protect the environment and wildlife by prohibiting the intentional release of 10 or more balloons into the air. Both bills head to the governor.

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

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

▪ **General Assembly passes bill limiting insulin copays**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-S 0170B](#), [2021-H 5196A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Melissa A. Murray (D-Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) and House Speaker Pro Tempore Brian Patrick Kennedy (D-Dist. 38, Hopkinton, Westerly) to limit insured patients' copays for insulin used to treat diabetes to \$40 for a 30-day supply. The bill now goes to the governor's desk.

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▪ **Assembly OKs expanded access to telemedicine coverage**

The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-S 0004Baa](#), [2021-H 6032Aaa](#)) sponsored by Senate Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) and House Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Stephen M. Casey (D-Dist. 50, Woonsocket) to expand telemedicine coverage requirements for insurers and require that all Rhode Island Medicaid programs cover telemedicine visits —visits with health care providers via telephone or audio-video enabled device.

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- **Bill passes to create registry of short-term rental on third-party platforms**
The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-H 5505A](#), [2021-S 0501B](#)) sponsored by Rep. Lauren H. Carson (D-Dist. 75, Newport) and Sen. Dawn Euer (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown) and now going to the governor, to require every short-term rental property listed for rent on the website of any third-party hosting platform that conducts business in Rhode Island to be registered with the Department of Business Regulation.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Assembly approves requirement for doula insurance coverage**
The General Assembly approved legislation ([2021-H 5929A](#), [2021-S 0484A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Marcia Ranglin-Vassell (D-Dist. 5, Providence) and Sen. Ana B. Quezada (D-Dist. 2, Providence) to make doula services eligible for reimbursement through private insurance plans. The legislation, which was also included in the state budget bill, now heads to the governor.
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- **Lawmakers authorize harm reduction center program to combat OD deaths**
The General Assembly passed legislation ([2021-H 5245A](#), [2021-S 0016B](#)) introduced by Majority Floor Manager John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Tiverton, Portsmouth) and Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) that would authorize a two-year pilot program to prevent drug overdoses through the establishment of harm reduction centers, which are a community-based resource for health screening, disease prevention and recovery assistance where persons may safely consume pre-obtained substances under the supervision of health care professionals.
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- **Assembly passes civic literacy proficiency requirement in Rhode Island schools**
The General Assembly passed legislation ([2021-S 0076Aaa](#), [2021-H 5028Aaa](#)) sponsored by Sen. Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick) and Rep. Brian C. Newberry (R-Dist. 48, North Smithfield, Burrillville) that requires students to demonstrate proficiency in civics education before high school graduation. All middle and high school students attending public schools, or any other schools managed and controlled by the state, will have to demonstrate proficiency in civics education that will also satisfy half credit or course requirement in history and social studies.
- **Enacted bill allows restaurants to continue COVID-era outdoor seating**
The General Assembly passed Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett) and Sen. Alana M. DiMario's (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown) legislation ([2021-H 6119B](#) / [2021-S 0654A](#)) which imposes a moratorium on the enforcement of any municipal ordinance or zoning requirement that would penalize owners of food service establishments and bars for any modifications or alternations to their premises in response to an emergency declaration by the governor or local municipal officials. The moratorium will continue throughout the emergency declaration and will remain effective until April 1, 2022.
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- **General Assembly passes legislation to increase temporary caregiver benefits**
The General Assembly passed legislation ([2021-H 6090A](#), [2021-S 0688A](#)) sponsored by House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence) and Sen. Valarie J. Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) that increases temporary caregiver benefits to five weeks in a benefit year starting Jan. 1, 2022, and increases again to six weeks in a benefit year beginning Jan. 1, 2023.
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- **Lawmakers OK requiring feminine hygiene products in public schools**
The General Assembly passed legislation ([2021-S 0086A](#), [2021-H 5083A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Valarie J. Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) and Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D-Dist. 33, South Kingstown, Narragansett) that requires all public schools to provide feminine hygiene products at no cost to students.
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