

June 19, 2015

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.rilin.state.ri.us/News/>



- **House unanimously approves 2016 state budget**

The House approved an \$8.7 billion state budget bill that eliminates state income tax on Social Security benefits for many Rhode Islanders, does away with taxes on utilities for businesses, includes economic and jobs development initiatives and provides funding for school construction and greater tax relief for lower-income families. The plan ([2015-H 5900A](#)) includes no broad-based tax increases, fully funds the education aid formula and includes Gov. Gina Raimondo’s structural changes to Medicaid, although with a smaller impact on hospitals and nursing homes. It does not include a recently proposed plan to toll large trucks to pay for highway and bridge repairs. The bill was approved by the Senate Finance Committee and goes before the Senate Tuesday.

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

- **House OKs O’Grady charter school bill**

The House approved legislation ([2015-H 5555aa](#)) sponsored by Rep. Jeremiah T. O’Grady (D-Dist. 46, Lincoln, Pawtucket) to require the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to consider the financial impact on sending districts before any new charter school, mayoral academy or expansion of one can be approved.

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- **House bans powdered alcohol for those under 21**

The House passed legislation ([2015-H 5189A](#)) banning the sale or delivery or possession of powdered alcohol to people under age 21, as well as possession of it by them. The Senate has also passed legislation ([2015-S 0175A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Frank

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Lombardo III (D-Dist. 25, Johnston) to ban the substance.

▪ **House approves Community-Police Relationship Act**

The House approved the Comprehensive Community–Police Relationship Act ([2015-H 5819A](#)) sponsored by Rep. Joseph S. Almeida (D-Dist. 12, Providence) aimed at improving relations between the community and police. The bill will require all police departments to continue to collect data on race at traffic stops and report actions taken to address any racial disparities in traffic stops and searches. The legislation also prohibits consent searches of juveniles without reasonable suspicion or probable cause of criminal activity. The Senate has passed identical legislation ([2015-S 0669aa](#)) sponsored by Sen. Harold M. Metts (D-Dist. 6, Providence.)

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▪ **Senate approves bill to make utility debt forgiveness program more effective**

The Senate today approved legislation sponsored by Sen. Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) making it easier for struggling families to earn forgiveness for utility debt. The bill ([2015-S 0199A](#)) makes changes to the Henry Shelton Act, named after the longtime anti-poverty and social justice activist and founder of the George Wiley Center in Pawtucket, to allow people who enroll in the debt management plan to earn incremental forgiveness over the course of the year, instead of earning full forgiveness only after successfully completing a three-year plan.

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▪ **Senate approves domestic violence prevention fund**

The Senate approved legislation ([2015-S 0650](#)) sponsored by Sen. Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence) creating a new fund aimed at preventing domestic and dating violence in Rhode Island. Funded through a surcharge on marriage licenses and administered by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, it would be used to pay for evidence-based programs designed to prevent domestic and dating violence throughout Rhode Island. Rep. Christopher R. Blazewski (D-Dist. 2, Providence) is sponsoring identical legislation ([2015-H 5651](#)) in the House.

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▪ **House passes McNamara bill allowing terminally ill to use experimental drugs**

The House passed legislation ([2015-H 5093](#)) introduced by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston) creating the Rhode Island Terminally Ill Patients Right to Try Act of 2015 that would allow terminally ill patients to obtain experimental drugs that have not yet been federally approved but which may be in the final stages of FDA testing. The measure now heads to the Senate.

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

▪ **House passes Tanzi bill phasing out cesspools**

The House passed legislation ([2015-H 5668A](#)) introduced by Rep. Teresa Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett) to provide for the eventual removal of all cesspools in the state. The bill provides for the eventual removal of all cesspools beyond the previously set boundaries. It would require that any cesspool be replaced upon the sale or transfer of the property where the cesspool is located. Identical

legislation ([2015-S 0369A](#)) sponsored by Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski (D-Dist. 37, South Kingstown, New Shoreham) has passed the Senate.

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▪ **Senate approves investment accounts for disabled children**

Legislation ([2015-S 0465A](#)) sponsored by Sen. Adam Satchell (D-Dist. 9, West Warwick) and approved by the Senate would allow the creation of tax-free investment accounts similar to 529 college savings plans to support services for disabled Rhode Islanders when they reach adulthood. The funds from the account could be used for qualified expenses such as education, housing, transportation and services such as employment programs, personal support services, health prevention and wellness, financial management and more. Similar legislation ([2015-H 5564](#)) has been introduced in the House by Rep. Robert A. Nardolillo III (R-Dist. 28, Coventry).

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▪ **Leader Ruggerio's Rhode Island Works legislation heard in Senate Finance**

Senate Majority Leader Dominick J. Ruggerio (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) submitted legislation ([2015-S-0997](#)) to implement Gov. Gina Raimondo's bridge replacement, reconstruction and maintenance plan. The legislation was heard by the Senate Finance Committee on Thursday and held for further study. House Majority Leader John J. DiSimone (D-Dist. 5, Providence) is sponsoring the bill ([2015-H 6321](#)) in the House.

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