

2012 LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

BUDGET

- The Fiscal Year 2013 state budget provides \$33 million in additional funding for education aid, restores \$9.6 million to programs for the developmentally disabled, and restores funding for nursing homes.
- The budget proposes \$209 million in capital investment to be considered on the November ballot, including funding for affordable housing, a new state Veterans' Home, improvements at Rhode Island College, and clean water and open space projects.
- Lawmakers rejected the governor's proposals to increase the meals tax from 8 percent to 10 percent, and his proposal to extend the sales tax to car washes and warehouses. The enacted budget does not include the governor's proposal to expand the hotel tax to vacation rentals and bed-and-breakfasts.

EDUCATION

- The budget includes \$22 million to fully fund the second year of the state education aid formula, as well as an additional \$11 million to accelerate the implementation plan as proposed by the governor. The budget also gives cities and towns a break on "maintenance of effort" – a requirement that their local contribution to schools not fall below what it was the year prior. The relief allows municipalities to exclude the local share of specific non-recurring expenses that no longer exist and not be penalized for reducing funding to school districts.
- Contingent upon appropriation for the 2013-2014 school year, the Assembly passed a law to jumpstart up to four full-day kindergarten programs in the state.
- The legislature passed a law preventing children from receiving out-of-school suspensions for absenteeism.
- The General Assembly approved and the governor signed legislation regulating the use of former hazardous material sites for new school construction.
- Lawmakers enacted "The College and Career Success for All Students Act," which aims to ensure that each Rhode Island student has a sufficient education for success after high school and offers rules and regulations regarding teacher training for advanced placement courses.
- Recognizing that online learning has become an important aspect in the delivery and effectiveness of education in the United States, legislators enacted a law promoting the use of and quality of virtual courses as part of public education in the state.

- The 2013 budget begins to streamline the work of the Board of Governors for Higher Education and the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education by consolidating them into an 11-member Board of Education to help coordinate the state's education systems.
- Legislators enacted a law mandating that any person seeking to participate in a mentoring program that works with students must adhere to national and state criminal background checks.
- The General Assembly gave a high school student a seat at the table of the Rhode Island Board of Regents, the chief policy-setting body overseeing the elementary and secondary education, so the panel can receive input on college preparedness in public schools.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/BUSINESS

- The Revenue Protection Act was enacted to protect state revenues, maintain the competitiveness of the state's two gaming venues and safeguard jobs at the two facilities. The legislation establishes a tax structure, regulatory framework and enforcement system prior to consideration by voters in November to allow table games at the two facilities.
- Legislation was enacted to update the state fire code and increase flexibility and options for businesses that must comply with the code, aimed at reducing the burdens placed on small businesses.
- Funds were included in the Fiscal Year 2013 budget to fund the purchase and operation of a web-accessible software system to be used by the state and municipalities, offering a uniform building plan review, permit management and inspection system.
- The Fiscal Year 2013 budget provides \$3.9 million to support the continuing work of the I-195 Redevelopment District Commission. The funds will be used to complete the sale of land made available by the relocation of I-195 through Providence and to support three years of the commission's operating expenses.
- The General Assembly passed and the governor signed resolutions approving plans of the RI Economic Development Corporation to issue \$7.5 million in bonds for dredging at the Port of Davisville.
- Legislation was approved and signed into law to require a cost-benefit analysis and periodic review of all regulations governing or impacting small businesses, with an eye to determining any adverse impacts.

- In an effort to help charitable fundraising, legislation was enacted to allow expiration dates on gift cards or gift certificates given by merchants to non-profit corporations or associations for fund-raising purposes.
- Legislation was enacted to allow employers in any industry to petition the Department of Labor and Training for permission to pay employees less frequently than weekly, provided they meet certain conditions.
- Bills were approved and signed into law to put construction projects on a faster track by mandating that the lack of a curb-cut permit is not cause for a building official to delay examination of a building permit application.
- Legislation has been signed into law to boost RI agriculture and seafood industries by directing the Department of Environmental Management to establish a program to provide small grants and technical assistance to farms and seafood businesses to promote sales of locally grown products.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE

- Rhode Island became the 15th state to decriminalize marijuana, eliminating the criminal charge for carrying 1 ounce or less and instead imposing a civil penalty of a \$150 fine, plus forfeiture of the drug. A third offense within 18 months would revert to a misdemeanor.
- Legislators enacted Jason's Law to prevent those serving time for particularly serious crimes from earning time off their sentences for good behavior. The law was introduced in response to the potential release last year of Michael Woodmansee, convicted of killing 5-year-old Jason Foreman in 1975 in South Kingstown.
- A new law institutes mandatory license suspension for those convicted of leaving the scene of an accident resulting in serious injury.
- The Assembly made domestic assault by strangulation a felony punishable by up to 10 years of imprisonment.
- Involuntary manslaughter was removed from a list of criminal acts that draw an automatic life sentence when a gun is involved.
- Legislators changed a law that has allowed people who owe court costs or fines to avoid paying them by seeking jail time to take advantage of a law that provides them a \$150 credit toward their fines for every day they serve. Instead, they will be arrested and imprisoned only if they skip a hearing, and then they will receive only \$50 credit per day served.

- A new law adds gender identity to the definition of hate crimes tracked by the state.

ELECTIONS AND GOOD GOVERNMENT

- New district lines have been drawn for General Assembly and U.S. House of Representatives' seats that will be in effect with the upcoming elections. The redistricting is required by law every 10 years to adjust the state's political boundaries to account for population changes in the U.S. Census.
- The General Assembly approved legislation to make significant changes to the Access to Public Records Act (open records law), including making public various records that were not previously public, such as employment contracts.
- The Transparency in Political Spending Act (TIPS) approved by the legislature and signed into law will require individuals and organizations that engage in independent expenditures and electioneering communications to report donors and expenditures to the Board of Elections.
- The House of Representatives and Senate adopted a joint resolution, signed by the governor, calling on Congress to pass and send to the states for approval a constitutional amendment overturning the Supreme Court ruling on *Citizens United* (SuperPACs).
- In conjunction with redistricting, legislation was passed and enacted to allow the number of active voters served by the same polling place to increase from the current 1,900 voters to 3,000.
- Legislation was approved and signed to prohibit elections boards from eliminating any polling place that is presently located in a low-income or elderly residential development.

HEALTH

- The legislature dealt with concerns about the state's medical marijuana compassion centers with a piece of compromise legislation. After the governor halted the issuing of licenses to three proposed medical marijuana facilities last year, the bill will allow the facilities to open later this year.
- Lawmakers altered the Hospital Conversion Act to eliminate a prohibition on for-profit companies acquiring more than one hospital in the state in a three-year period. The law will enable Steward Health Care Services of Massachusetts to complete its purchase of Landmark Medical Center in Woonsocket, which is in receivership, and can be utilized for subsequent hospital conversions.

- Legislators required all food-service establishments to have a food protection manager on staff and allergy-awareness posters in staff areas. The law also mandates notices on menus and menu boards asking customers to make servers aware when placing their orders if someone in the party has a food allergy.
- A new law allows school bus drivers and monitors, after receiving proper training, to administer an epinephrine auto-injector (marketed under trade names such as EpiPen) to an affected student while in transit to or from school, or at a school event.
- Legislators created a pilot program to divert people with behavioral, alcohol or substance abuse issues away from emergency rooms and into continuum care for treatment and recovery.
- The General Assembly passed a law to ensure quality care and adequate staffing at all long-term care facilities – including nonprofit and for-profit facilities – as the state adopts its new reimbursement methodology.
- The Comprehensive Children’s Jewelry Safety Act mandates that all children’s jewelry sold in Rhode Island must conform to national product safety guidelines, which ban the use of various toxic materials, such as cadmium, lead and arsenic.
- The General Assembly enacted legislation to establish health insurance standards consistent with the standards established in the existing federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010.
- Lawmakers passed a law calling for containers to be made available at local police departments for the disposal of unused, expired or unwanted drug products.
- The General Assembly has restricted children under 18 years old from using indoor tanning facilities unless they have a doctor’s note or a parent signs a consent form in person at every other tanning session.
- The General Assembly passed legislation that ensures health insurance coverage for psychological or psychiatric services and pharmaceuticals associated with autism spectrum disorders, and would add regulations for the licensing of behavior analysts.
- A new law has been enacted to protect those who administer opioid antagonists to someone they believe to be suffering the effects of a drug overdose from both civil and criminal liability.
- The House of Representatives passed a resolution urging President Barack Obama to restore funding to a program that has helped drastically reduce Rhode Island’s child lead poisoning rate.

CONSUMER/QUALITY OF LIFE

- The minimum wage was increased to \$7.75, beginning Jan. 1, 2013. The current minimum wage, \$7.40, has been in place since 2007.
- Adopted by the General Assembly and signed into law, the “Homeless Bill of Rights” is the first of its kind in the nation, guaranteeing that no person’s rights, privileges or access to public services can be denied solely because he or she is homeless.
- Under newly-enacted law, the Public Utilities Commission and Division of Utilities and Carriers will require electric utilities to conduct stray voltage detection surveys and complete timely repairs of faults. The bill was prompted by an incident last year when a puppy died after stepping on an electrified manhole cover in Providence.
- A new law reduces the time – from 90 days to 30 days – that a grandparent must wait to petition the court for the right to visit their grandchildren. The law also applies the shorter waiting period to siblings.
- Legislation was enacted to prohibit individuals and retailers of essential commodities from engaging in price gouging during a market emergency or upon declaration of a state of emergency by the governor or a federal disaster declaration.
- New law has been enacted to provide additional protections to RI homeowners with hurricane insurance policies, such as limiting a hurricane deductible to only once per hurricane season and providing a mediation process for claims.
- A new law passed this session will require any place of public accommodation that provides a TV for public viewing to keep closed-captioning activated on the TV, upon request of a guest or patron.

ENVIRONMENT

- Legislators approved and the governor signed a law giving paint companies in Rhode Island responsibility for collecting and properly reusing, recycling or otherwise disposing of the products they sell here. It also calls for consumer education and outreach, and the establishment of convenient collection sites around the state.
- In light of the odor issue at the Johnston landfill this year, the legislature enacted a law to set up an off-site ambient air monitoring network for the Johnston landfill. It is now also unlawful for RIRRC facilities to use construction debris or organic items as cover material.

- A new law allows municipalities and other authorized public entities to dispose of abandoned boats if their attempts to contact the owners fail. It is also lawful for those entities to recoup value from those vessels, if possible.
- Legislation was approved and signed to allow for the decommissioning of antiquated “Stage II” technology that collects gas fumes when refueling a vehicle. Stage II gasoline recovery systems are incompatible with newer technology, leading to vapor escape.
- The Senate and House approved resolutions calling on the state Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to adopt regulations and develop a pilot program for the placement of artificial reefs.
- The General Assembly created the Rhode Island Petroleum Savings and Independence Advisory Commission, which will work toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants from the associated use of petroleum.
- The legislature passed and the governor signed a law requiring the state to use “complete street” design features in all federal- and state-funded road construction projects, with an eye not only toward motorists, but also bicyclists, public transportation users and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

VETERANS AND MILITARY

- Legislators approved a question to be placed on the November ballot to borrow up to \$94 million for the construction of a new state Veterans’ Home in Bristol.
- A new law creates a veterans’ designation for driver’s licenses and state identification cards.
- Legislation was enacted to prevent foreclosure on the home of any member of the military during active duty or deployment, and for nine months afterward.
- In response to controversy over a war memorial in Woonsocket, a permanent commission was created to hear requests to designate monuments as “category one memorials” that have attained secular traditional, cultural or community recognition or value.
- Legislators passed a new law to facilitate a fair, efficient, and swift process to resolve custody and visitation matters when a parent is deployed by the military.
- The Assembly brought Rhode Island’s elections laws into compliance with the federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act, aimed at helping deployed military members and others abroad to register and vote.

OTHER LEGISLATION

- The Assembly created a State House Visitors Center and Gift Shop in the State Capitol, to be operated by the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Bills have been signed to allow the director of DEM, or a representative of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, to act as an animal advocate in any court before which the custody or well-being of an animal is at issue.
- Rules for the proper care and treatment of dogs kept outdoors, including guidelines for tethering, feeding and providing veterinary care, have been signed into law.
- Legislation has become law to require parking spaces for motorcycles to be made available at lots near state, city or town buildings.
- The SSV Oliver Hazard Perry has been designated as the official state sailing education vessel and will be available for public viewing and education programs.
- The Assembly called for the creation of the Senator Claiborne Pell Commission on the Humanities to foster a greater appreciation for the humanities and to promote a humanities curriculum in public and private institutions.