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Legislative Press Bureau at (401) 528-1743

THIS YEAR AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE — Here are the highlights from news and events that took place in the General Assembly this year. For more information on any of these items visit <http://www.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease>



HEALTHCARE

- The budget includes \$22 million to help Rhode Islanders who either [lost federal subsidies or became ineligible for Medicaid](#) to access affordable health insurance.
- The legislature codified [Children’s Mobile Response and Stabilization Services](#) in state law and [strengthened coverage and reimbursement](#) for mobile youth crisis response teams.
- The budget includes \$5 million in 2027 for startup costs for the proposed new [medical school at the University of Rhode Island](#).
- The legislature supported the [sale of Roger Williams Medical Center and Fatima Hospital](#) by creating an \$18-million fund to assist buyer Centurion in closing the transaction.
- The General Assembly fully implemented \$115 million in [increased Medicaid rates](#) recommended by the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner.
- Lawmakers ensured that [Medicare patients over 65 years old](#) can enroll in Medicare supplemental coverage programs, regardless of pre-existing conditions.
- Legislators have added \$15 million over what the governor proposed for [uncompensated care](#) to the state’s hospitals.
- The Assembly helped homebound patients [access routine foot care](#) at home.
- Lawmakers created [artificial intelligence safety guidelines](#) related to suicidal ideation and mental health treatment.
- The budget included funding for [Newport Hospital’s Noreen Stonor Drexel Birthing Center](#) and prevents the closure of any birthing center without notice, application, financial disclosure, public hearing, and approval by the Department of Health.

More...

- The General Assembly streamlined [blood lead test analysis](#) for children.
- The budget directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to authorize rate enhancement for nursing homes and other long-term care facilities for patients with [complex behavioral health needs](#).
- The budget includes \$400,000 in state funding for the [Health Professional Loan Repayment Program](#), which provides loan repayment assistance to health professionals such as licensed primary care, dental, and mental health clinicians, working for a minimum of two years in an approved health professional shortage area.
- The legislature improved oral health among vulnerable Rhode Islanders by [expanding reimbursement eligibility for public health dental hygienists](#).
- The General Assembly will study the issue of [safe hospital staffing](#) ratios.
- The legislature protected coverage for [routine childhood and adult vaccines](#) under Rhode Island law.
- The General Assembly required healthcare providers to notify patients if they use [artificial intelligence tools](#) to document visits.
- The General Assembly [protected patients from having their health insurance claim denied](#) because of their insurer or healthcare provider's belief that another party may be liable.
- The General Assembly required a form of licensing for [pharmacy benefit managers](#).
- The General Assembly increased the [accountability and transparency](#) of pharmacy benefit managers.
- Legislators created a [Medicaid pilot program](#) that leverages medically tailored meals and other nutritional supports to improve the health of those with chronic, diet-related conditions.
- The Senate created a commission [to study the impact of medical malpractice](#) on Rhode Island's healthcare system.
- The Senate established a permanent commission [to explore ways to support retention of the state's primary care workforce](#) and strengthen graduate medical education programs.

RELIEF FOR RHODE ISLANDERS

- Lawmakers included a [new refundable child tax credit of \\$330 per child](#) in the state budget.
- Legislators [expanded eligibility for the Social Security income tax exemption](#) by removing the age threshold.
- The budget included a proposal to [institute a high-earner's tax of 1%](#) a year over three years on income exceeding \$1 million a year.
- The budget increased [childcare assistance eligibility to 285%](#) of the federal poverty level, and childcare providers' reimbursement rate for infants will increase.
- Legislators raised the amount of [child support a family enrolled in RI Works can keep to the federal maximum](#), which is \$100 per month for one child, and \$200 per month for more than one child.

- The budget provides [\\$2.95 million to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank](#) to help address food insecurity.
- The budget [sets aside federal benefits for children in state care](#). Currently, the Department of Children, Youth and Families takes federal benefits from children in state care to fund administrative costs and sustain DCYF's budget.
- The budget includes \$4.1 million to fund a program that provides Rhode Island Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program recipients with [additional benefits when they buy fruits and vegetables](#).

ELEMENTARY and SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Lawmakers added more than \$24 million to the governor's proposal to [fully fund direct state education aid](#) and increase the student success factor.
- The city of [Central Falls will regain immediate control of its school district](#) after more than three decades of state control.
- The General Assembly has created a commission to [study the feasibility of revamping the funding formula](#) for all public education.
- The Assembly limited [transaction and processing fees](#) for school meals.
- The General Assembly ordered the Department of Education to create a statewide [anti-hazing policy for Rhode Island public schools](#).
- Lawmakers [prevented the creation or expansion of any district charter school](#), independent charter school or mayoral academy for three years while the issue of equitable school funding is studied.
- The budget includes \$750,000 for a new [Support and Access to Bilingual Education](#) fund within the Department of Education to support multilingual learning programs.
- The legislature required [school districts to cooperate more with the courts](#) regarding children in state care and their education.
- The budget extended the [period of eligibility for early intervention programs](#) for infants and children with disabilities.
- Lawmakers expanded the requirement of automated external defibrillators in schools while [establishing and implementing a cardiac emergency response](#) plan.
- Lawmakers required schools to adopt action plans for students diagnosed with [epilepsy and seizure disorders](#).
- The General Assembly included the [phone numbers of suicide prevention](#) and substance abuse crisis hotlines on student ID cards.
- The Assembly strengthened a law that reduces [school cafeteria waste](#) in the state's landfill.
- The House of Representative created a commission to study [the issues relating to exploring a shared services model between Rhode Island school districts](#) facing funding and operational challenges.
- Lawmakers added a school resource officer to the [Rhode Island School Safety Committee](#).

HIGHER EDUCATION

- Lawmakers authorized a ballot question asking voters to [approve \\$275 million in borrowing for improvements at higher education facilities](#) aimed at strengthening workforce preparedness.
- The Assembly extended [Rhode Island College's Hope Scholarship](#) for an additional three years.
- Lawmakers reduced the [Rhode Island residency requirement](#) for higher education students to be eligible for in-state tuition.
- The Assembly granted [Eagle Scouts and Girl Scout Gold Award recipients](#) automatic admission to the state's public colleges and universities.

GOVERNMENT and ELECTIONS

- Lawmakers established the [Office of Inspector General](#) to investigate fraud, waste and abuse across state agencies and quasi-public entities, as well as the municipal use of state funds.
- The legislature declared [data about traffic collisions](#) to be a public record.
- Lawmakers protected elected officials without spending taxpayer dollars by allowing [campaign funds to be used for home security](#) systems.
- The legislature allowed disabled and military voters to utilize [electronically transmitted ballots](#).
- The Assembly prohibited [ICE employees, agents or officials from being within 200 feet of any polling place during voting](#), including early voting and election day voting.
- The Assembly moved the [primary election date to Wednesday](#) when the previous Monday is Labor Day.
- Lawmakers [amended signature requirements](#) and deadlines for presidential preference delegate primaries.
- The General Assembly moved the [Rhode Island presidential preference primary](#) to Super Tuesday.
- Lawmakers required the Board of Elections to [establish a secure area](#) for the public observation of mail ballot processing and required the mail ballot voter's signature be compared to the signature on file.
- The General Assembly [rescinded its 1861 ratification of a constitutional amendment](#) that would have codified states' rights to slavery in the U.S. Constitution.

HOUSING

- The budget includes a \$120 million bond question for November's ballot, to support [affordable housing construction and redevelopment](#) and for homeownership programs.
- The General Assembly [expanded the searchable online database](#) of low- and moderate-income housing to better serve Rhode Islanders searching for a home.
- The legislature amended the [Abandoned Properties Act](#) to prevent its abuse and make its provisions clearer.

- The General Assembly ensured that [recovery residences](#) that provide support services for those people recovering from substance use addiction are considered residences, not commercial structures, in zoning ordinances and fire and building codes.
- Lawmakers provided a framework through which the Department of Business Regulation can seek [grants to fund a home hardening program](#).
- The Assembly enacted the [Uniform Partition of Heirs' Property Act](#) to address a situation that commonly occurs when a property is inherited by multiple heirs without a formal estate plan.
- Lawmakers enabled cities and towns to allow [Supportive and Functional Emergency units](#), such as pallet shelters, on a temporary basis during a declaration of an emergency.
- The House created a commission to study ways to evaluate, plan for and limit the [impacts of new housing developments on public water supplies](#) and watersheds in rural areas.
- Lawmakers established a [commission to study potential modernization of and updates to the state's Condominium Act](#), which has not been reviewed or amended in more than a decade

SOCIAL PROTECTIONS

- The General Assembly protected the [constitutional rights of Rhode Islanders](#) from federal officials by creating a right to sue in state court.
- The General Assembly [protected those attending court proceedings](#) in Rhode Island from arrest by ICE or other federal immigration authorities.
- The General Assembly revised the state's definitions of [felonies, misdemeanors and petty misdemeanors](#) to close a loophole that allowed lawful permanent residents and other noncitizens to be deported for minor, nonviolent offenses.
- The legislature changed the name of the Rhode Island Drug Court to the [Rhode Island Recovery Court](#).
- Legislators made the possibility of [criminal record expungement](#) more widely available to help address barriers that make it difficult for many rehabilitated Rhode Islanders to lead successful lives.
- Lawmakers helped children in state care with the [costs of driver education](#) classes.
- Lawmakers required that tenants and short-term guests receive educational materials about [public shoreline access rights](#).
- The House of Representatives established a legislative commission [to study the use and impacts of digital technology on children](#), public education and mental health.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- The General Assembly approved "[Casey's Law](#)" to add extra penalties for motor vehicle offenses when they involve road rage.
- The General Assembly required the [posting of signs about the state's suicide and crisis hotline](#) at gun ranges.

- Lawmakers strengthened Rhode Island’s laws [combatting identity fraud](#) and emerging forms of digital deception.
- Lawmakers made it a [felony to disarm, or attempt to disarm, a police officer](#).
- The General Assembly created a [database for electric cars](#) to aid in firefighting efforts.
- Lawmakers protected tax filers from [fraudulent or illegal tax preparation services](#).
- The legislature revoked or reduced state pension benefits for [state workers convicted of sex crimes](#).
- The legislature allowed officers to use their discretion to issue a verbal warning or pursue misdemeanor or felony charges when a [child is left unattended](#) in a motor vehicle.
- Lawmakers required bars and similar establishments to have [lids available to protect patrons from having their drinks spiked](#).

VICTIMS’ RIGHTS

- The Assembly allowed individuals who were sexually abused as minors to sue institutions, organizations and individuals for negligent supervision or [concealment of a person who sexually abused a minor](#).
- The legislature enabled [abuse survivors to terminate rental leases](#) for the sake of their protection.
- The Assembly allowed [stalking victims to recover relocation or home modification expenses](#) from the existing Crime Victim Compensation Program.
- Lawmakers made [hit-and-run victims suffering from serious bodily injury](#) eligible to receive support from the Crime Victim Compensation Program.

ENVIRONMENT

- The proposed [green bond became greener by expanding the bond total to \\$55 million](#) and adding funds for open space and climate resiliency measures.
- Lawmakers addressed [energy rates without jeopardizing the state’s efforts to reduce reliance](#) on carbon-emitting fossil fuels.
- Lawmakers created a special joint legislative commission to study Rhode Island’s [growing biosolids disposal challenges](#).
- Lawmakers banned the [sale of invasive plants](#) in Rhode Island.
- The budget included funding for the purchase of new [forestry firefighting hoses](#) for the Department of Environmental Management.
- The General Assembly amended the [Consumer PFAS Ban Act of 2024](#) by clarifying enforcement provisions, providing the Department of Environmental Management with authority to join a multijurisdictional clearinghouse to assist in carrying out the requirements of the law.
- Lawmakers created an [energy-use reporting requirement](#) for large buildings and campuses.
- The General Assembly [prohibited any thermal waste conversion facilities](#) from operating at Quonset.

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The budget authorizes ballot questions for a [\\$100 million bond for economic development initiatives](#) and a \$50 million cultural economy bond.
- The General Assembly combatted [several forms of business identity theft](#), helped prevent business scams, and assisted individuals and businesses who have been impacted by fraud.
- Lawmakers changed [Rhode Island tax law](#) relating to the filing of a 1099 form to make it consistent with policies of the Internal Revenue Service.
- The Assembly prohibited [restrictive covenants that prevent grocery stores](#) from occupying a particular property.
- The legislature allowed [bars and restaurants to stay open later](#) during 2026 World Cup games.
- The Assembly gave itself the authority to [negotiate all undersea projects](#) impacting areas over 25 acres, including transmission cables for offshore wind projects.
- Lawmakers added telecommunications infrastructure to a law [protecting electric and communications lines](#) from tampering.
- The Senate created a special legislative commission [to study the effects of blockchain and cryptocurrency](#) in the state.

TRANSPORTATION

- The budget addresses the [Rhode Island Public Transit Authority's operating budget shortfall](#) and provides additional funds for buses and improvements to bus shelters.
- The budget will require an [efficiency and performance audit of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation's](#) maintenance programs.
- Lawmakers created special license plates for [disabled individuals whose vehicles are modified](#) to accommodate their disability.
- The budget prohibits the [director of the Department of Transportation](#) from serving as the chair of RIPTA's board of directors.
- The Assembly helped the city of Providence save the [Crook Point Bascule Bridge](#), the rusted railroad drawbridge that has become an iconic city feature.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

- The Assembly [criminalized deed theft](#) — an increasingly common practice that bold scammers use to actually steal homes and real estate.
- Lawmakers ensured that Rhode Island consumers [retain control over their own genetic information](#) when they use genetic testing companies.
- The legislature required insurers to [provide customers with advance notice](#) of nonrenewal for homeowners and residential fire insurance policies.
- The General Assembly required all public utilities to [maintain a customer service facility](#) within the state to perform services such as addressing customer inquiries and accepting bill payments.
- Lawmakers protected public library access to [e-books and audiobooks](#).

LABOR

- The legislature established [limits on the use of self-checkout lanes](#) at grocery stores in Rhode Island.
- The legislature required employers to provide each [employee of a warehouse distribution center](#) with written descriptions of quotas and responsibilities.
- Lawmakers gave [domestic workers the same protections](#) under the Fair Employment Practices Act as other Rhode Island workers.
- The General Assembly ensured that more developmentally disabled adults can self-direct the care they need and want by allowing [care professionals to collectively negotiate with the state](#).
- The Assembly allowed for [healthcare worker platforms](#) through which workers can accept one or more shifts to perform services at a healthcare facility.

VETERANS and MILITARY

- The Assembly permitted [military-connected students](#) to enroll in public schools by remote registration.
- The General Assembly [expanded the eligibility for disabled veterans](#) to receive disabled veterans license plates and have their vehicle registration and license fees waived.
- Lawmakers established the [Rhode Island Orange Heart Medal](#) to formally recognize Rhode Island veterans whose service exposed them to toxic herbicides, burn pits or other hazardous agents.
- The legislature created [three new state awards](#) to recognize Rhode Island military and National Guard members.
- Lawmakers allowed [disabled veterans' license plates](#) to be transferred to spouses.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

- The legislature phased out [dangerous rat poisons that harm wildlife](#) and created a pilot program to help communities with safer alternatives for rodent control.
- The General Assembly allowed municipal animal control officers to lawfully take charge of and [provide adequate care to any animal found abandoned](#), neglected, cruelly treated or in a dangerous hoarding situation.
- The General Assembly established a framework for [veterinary telemedicine](#) in Rhode Island to expand access to quality care for pets.