

Dec. 31, 2020

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>



COVID-19 CRISIS

- Legislators approved a supplemental budget for FY 2020 that used a combination of new federal funding, the state's rainy day fund and unspent funds throughout state agencies to address a budget gap of about \$250 million caused largely by revenue losses linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also accounted for \$1.4 billion in new unemployment claims, most of which was covered by federal funds.
- The House of Representatives created a task force to oversee the state's implementation of the COVID-19 vaccine distribution.
- The General Assembly allowed communities and fire districts to continue their operations and conduct public hearings virtually during a state of emergency.
- Legislators approved a measure for 2020's primary and general elections to allow emergency mail ballot applications to be processed at local boards of canvassers in person on electronic poll pads that allowed the voter to then cast their ballot themselves into a state-approved voting machine on site.

EQUITY AND JUSTICE

- The General Assembly approved the Fair Chance Licensing Act to prevent Rhode Islanders from being denied an occupational license because of an unrelated criminal conviction.
- A Senate task force studied the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights and offered several potential reforms to increase transparency and accountability.
- Rhode Island officially removed "and Providence Plantations" from the state's name after voters approved a question lawmakers placed on November's ballot to make the change.

More...

- Lawmakers confirmed the first person of color as a justice on Rhode Island's Supreme Court, as well as other judicial appointments that will result in the first majority-female Supreme Court, the first Asian-American on the Superior Court bench and the first Latina on the Family Court bench.
- Legislators approved the Rhode Island Parentage Act to repeal archaic and inequitable state law regarding parentage and replace it with a uniform act that provides procedures establishing parentage, genetic testing, surrogacy agreements and assisted reproduction.

BUDGET

- The Assembly enacted a streamlined 2021 state budget restoring proposed cuts to municipal aid including distressed communities and car tax reimbursements, provider rates and social programs. The bill fully funds state aid to education according to the state education formula.
- Through the budget bill, lawmakers approved a total of \$400 million in bonds that will be put before voters in a special election March 2. The seven questions seek voters' approval for borrowing for higher education facilities, environment and recreational resources, affordable housing, transportation, the early childhood and education capital fund, arts and cultural infrastructure and commerce infrastructure.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- The General Assembly approved legislation to prohibit the manufacturing, transfer, purchase or possessing of any plastic, fiberglass or 3-D printed gun, as well as "ghost guns," untraceable guns and undetectable guns.
- The Julie Lynn Cardinal Act will require gun sellers to forward firearm applications to the police department of the city or town where the buyer resides.

WORKERS

- The General Assembly approved legislation raising the state's minimum wage by \$1 to \$11.50 an hour. The law took effect on Oct. 1.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- A bill amending the state's motion picture tax credit program passed the General Assembly. The legislation amends the current program by allowing productions to utilize tax credits, even if the majority of production is not done within the state, if the production spends a minimum of \$10 million.
- To facilitate greater use, lawmakers allowed people to register online to use Rhode Island's mobile app for sports wagering, rather than having to sign up in person at Twin River in Lincoln or Tiverton.

HEALTH

- Legislators strengthened the Hospital Conversions Act by requiring a review of each proposed hospital conversion to ensure that it complies with antitrust laws.
- Lawmakers addressed separation of powers issues with the law expanding licensing of medical marijuana compassion centers, and clarified intended limits of the expansion.

VETERANS

- Lawmakers rejected a budget proposal for fee increases at the Veterans Home.

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