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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>



### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- The General Assembly [approved a \\$9.97 billion budget for the 2020 fiscal year](#) that largely avoids new taxes while strengthening education, continuing the car-tax phase-out and maintaining municipal aid, while also closing a \$200 million budget gap.
- Lawmakers passed a bill to [allow mobile sports wagering](#) through the Twin River casinos in Lincoln and Tiverton.
- The legislature established a process for [creating Special Economic Development Districts](#) on large state-owned properties and designated the former Route 195 land in Providence as one.
- Lawmakers streamlined Rhode Island's financial regulatory structure for users of [blockchain technology](#).
- The legislature included a [Small Business Development Fund](#) in the budget to encourage investment in the state's job-producing small businesses.

### **PERSONAL RIGHTS**

- The General Assembly passed the [Reproductive Privacy Act](#), codifying the decisions of Roe v. Wade.
- Lawmakers amended the state's [civil statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse](#).
- Lawmakers passed a bill that would consider general discharges that were given to veterans [based solely on their sexual orientation](#) to have all the benefits of an honorable discharge.

More...

- Lawmakers passed a bill protecting consumers' [right to pay in cash](#) at retail establishments.

## **EDUCATION**

- The Assembly passed legislation that brings a [comprehensive reform to curriculum](#), fast tracks the principal certification process and provides for [greater school-based management at the school level](#).
- The budget [increased aid to education](#) by \$33.4 million, added \$2.9 million to increase pre-kindergarten seats and increased funding for English language learning by \$2.3 million.
- The General Assembly created a separate [Board of Trustees for the University of Rhode Island](#).
- Lawmakers passed legislation allowing school districts to conduct instruction through virtual education for up to five days when schools have been closed due to inclement weather, emergency or any nonscheduled school closing.

## **TAXPAYER/WORKER/CONSUMER PROTECTION**

- The state budget includes language eliminating the “[tampon tax](#)” in Rhode Island.
- Legislators passed a law to [protect student loan borrowers](#) and establish oversight of student loan servicers operating in Rhode Island.
- The Assembly approved a law to [require religious organizations to provide pension fund updates](#).
- The General Assembly passed legislation to give [financial protections to furloughed employees](#) during government shutdowns.
- Lawmakers OK'd a bill to [provide information on workers' co-ops](#) when companies are set to shutter.
- Legislators made noncompetition agreements unenforceable against hourly wage employees, low-wage employees, children and students.

## **OPIOID CRISIS**

- The state budget includes language for the creation of a state [Opioid Stewardship Fund](#).
- Lawmakers [limited first-time opioid prescriptions](#) and expanded the Good Samaritan Overdose Prevention Act.
- The legislature approved a bill to [post opioid warning signs](#) at all pharmacies in Rhode Island.
- Lawmakers [expanded support following overdose](#) and mental health visits to emergency rooms.
- The General Assembly approved legislation to prevent insurance companies from [denying life insurance due to a naloxone prescription](#).

- Lawmakers passed legislation that requires private, in addition to public, schools to [provide and maintain opioid antagonists](#), such as Narcan.

## **HEALTH**

- The budget [included a Shared Responsibility Payment penalty](#) for individuals who do not have health insurance, with exceptions.
- The General Assembly approved legislation aimed at [providing stronger oversight for hospitals](#) being acquired by nonprofit entities.
- The budget [expanded the number of medical marijuana compassion center licenses](#) from three to nine.
- The state legislature approved a law that [eliminates archaic and offensive language](#) regarding disabilities in state job descriptions.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

- Lawmakers passed legislation [expanding domestic violence protective orders](#) to help more children.
- The General Assembly approved legislation [to increase school safety](#) by creating threat assessment teams in schools.

## **SENIORS**

- The Assembly passed several bills addressing [Alzheimer's disease and elder abuse](#).
- Lawmakers passed a bill making it [easier for homeowners to build](#) onto their houses to provide space for relatives.
- The General Assembly passed a bill to establish a formal process recognizing ["supported decision making,"](#) a structure of support for disabled or aging individuals.
- The budget included funding for the [Livable Home Modification Grant](#) Program allowing matching funding for outfitting homes for the elderly and disabled.
- Lawmakers passed the [Senior Savings Protection Act](#) that requires the reporting of financial exploitation of persons who are 60 years of age or older and persons who have a disability.
- The legislature [eliminated a sunset provision on a program that provides fare-free bus passes](#) to low-income seniors and disabled Rhode Islanders, making the program permanent.

## **SMALL BUSINESS**

- The budget incorporates legislation to [help the many Rhode Island small business owners](#) who will be hit by higher federal taxes under new federal tax laws.

- The General Assembly passed legislation to provide a process for collecting sales tax from [out-of-state sellers](#) — removing the unfair advantage online retailers have in competing against Rhode Island businesses.
- Lawmakers passed legislation to [increase the amount of beer sold directly](#) to customers by breweries.
- The General Assembly approved legislation to allow contractors and builders to have [inspections performed by third-party inspectors](#) if a municipal building official does not perform required inspections swiftly.
- Legislators voted to [exempt natural hair braiders](#) from the state’s requirement for hairdressers and cosmeticians to be licensed with the state.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

- The budget includes up to \$200 million in GARVEE bonds to [fund the reconstruction of the viaduct](#) that carries Route 95 north through downtown Providence.
- The General Assembly passed the [Rhode Island Utility Fair Share Roadway Repair Act](#), which requires public utilities to repave and repair roadways that have been altered or excavated by the public utility.
- The General Assembly passed legislation cracking down on [bridge toll violators](#).
- The General Assembly passed a bill [extending air quality monitoring](#) at the playing fields adjacent to T.F. Green Airport.

## **ANIMALS**

- Lawmakers passed legislation requiring all pet shops to provide records to the Department of Environmental Management including breeder information, health certification, license and inspection information for each dog or cat offered for sale.
- The legislature passed a bill that [prevents owners from misrepresenting a pet](#) as a service animal in order to gain access to rights or privileges reserved for disabled individuals with service animals.
- The General Assembly approved a law that [adds pets to domestic violence protective orders](#).