

May 10, 2019

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.rilegislature.gov/pressrelease>



- **Legislative leaders unveil package of education reform bills**  
The leadership of the Rhode Island Senate and House of Representatives unveiled a package of education reform bills during a press conference. The legislation would bring a comprehensive reform to curriculum, instruction support, accountability, teacher certification, specialty skills certification, teacher assessments and the principal certification process. Spearheading the effort are Sen. Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick), chairwoman of the Senate Education Committee, Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston), chairman of the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare, Rep. Gregg Amore (D-Dist. 65, East Providence) and Sen. Ryan W. Pearson (D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln).  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate passes Ruggiero legislation to bring more transparency to pension plans**  
The Senate passed legislation ([2019-S 0431Aaa](#)) introduced by Senate President Dominick J. Ruggiero (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence) that would require all pension plans with at least 200 members not covered by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, to submit to the same public scrutiny, including public reporting of all its liabilities and assets. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives, where similar legislation ([2019-H 5287A](#)) has been introduced by House Majority Leader K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick)  
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate OKs Felag bill to exempt college application fees for veterans**  
The Senate passed legislation ([2019-S 0178](#)) introduced by Sen. Walter S. Felag (D-Dist. 10, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton) that would authorize the state's higher education

More...

institutions to waive application and transcript fees for veterans. The legislation states that the Council on Postsecondary Education shall authorize and encourage the presidents of the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island to exempt all veterans from any and all application and transcript fees. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives, where similar legislation ([2019-H 5272](#)) has been introduced by Rep. Samuel A. Azzinaro (D-Dist. 37, Westerly).

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▪ **Committee hears Sheehan bill on sexual harassment non-disclosure agreements**

The Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony on legislation ([2019-S 0456](#)) introduced by Sen. James C. Sheehan (D-Dist. 36, Narragansett, North Kingstown) that would limit the terms that can be included in an agreement that settles a claim of sexual harassment. The bill would permit sexual harassment victims the opportunity to make public, if they choose, the identity and nature of a charge after a five-year period.

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▪ **Hearing held on bill to raise tobacco purchase age to 21**

The House Finance Committee held a hearing on legislation ([2019-H 5603](#)) sponsored by Rep. Teresa Tanzi (D-Dist. 34, South Kingstown, Narragansett) to raise the age to buy tobacco products in Rhode Island to 21. The bill, which is now supported by the tobacco industry for the first time, would make Rhode Island the 13<sup>th</sup> state in the nation to raise the age to 21. Similar legislation ([2019-S 0462](#)) is sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Cynthia A. Coyne (D-Dist. 32, Barrington, Bristol, East Providence).

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▪ **Rep. Ruggiero's bill seeks consumer protection for solar customers**

Rep. Deborah Ruggiero (D-Dist. 74, Jamestown, Middletown) has proposed legislation ([2019-H 5991](#)) seeking to have the Office of Energy Resources adopt greater consumer protection measures for homeowners who invest in solar energy.

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▪ **Rep. O'Brien 'Right to Read Act' would combat youth dyslexia and illiteracy**

Rep. William W. O'Brien (D-Dist. 54, North Providence) has introduced legislation ([2019-H 5887](#)) that would require licensed elementary level teachers to be proficient in scientific reading instruction. Scientific reading instruction is the teaching of how sounds relate to letters and words during reading instruction. It is based upon research regarding how the brain works while learning spoken and written language with an emphasis on phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, orthographic awareness, and comprehension strategies.

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