

State of Rhode Island

Journal of the Senate

JANUARY SESSION of the General Assembly begun and held at the State House in the City of Providence on Tuesday, the Sixth day of January in the year of Our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty Six.

Volume 153, No. 1

Tuesday, January 06, 2026

First Legislative Day

CALL TO ORDER

The Senate meets pursuant to recess and is called to order by The Honorable Valarie J. Lawson, President of the Senate, at 4:02 o'clock P.M.

ROLL CALL

The roll is called and a quorum is declared present with 38 Senators present and 0 Senators absent as follows:

PRESENT –38: The Honorable President Valarie J. Lawson, Senators Acosta, Appollonio, Bell, Bissaillon, Britto, Burke, Ciccone, de la Cruz, DiMario, Dimitri, DiPalma, Euer, Famiglietti, Felag, Gallo, Gu, Kallman, LaMountain, Lauria, Mack, McKenney, Morgan, Murray, Paolino, Patalano, Pearson, Quezada, Raptakis, Rogers, Sosnowski, Thompson, Tikoian, Ujifusa, Urso, Valverde, Vargas, and Zurier.

ABSENT – 0:

INVOCATION

The Honorable President, by unanimous consent, presents Senator Appollonio to deliver the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

The Honorable President, by unanimous consent, presents Senator Appollonio, to lead the Senate in the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

SENATE PRESIDENT'S OPENING DAY ADDRESS

(See Appendix for Senate President's Opening Day Address)

IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION**Senate Resolution No. 2001**

BY Lawson

ENTITLED, SENATE RESOLUTION HONORING THE VICTIMS OF THE BROWN UNIVERSITY SHOOTING AND COMMENDING FIRST RESPONDERS
{LC3821/1}

Recommended for Immediate Consideration.

Senator Ciccone requests unanimous consent for immediate consideration.

Unanimous consent for immediate consideration is granted.

Senator Ciccone moves passage, seconded by The Honorable President Valarie J. Lawson, Senators Acosta, Appollonio, Bell, Bissaillon, Britto, Burke, de la Cruz, DiMario, Dimitri, DiPalma, Euer, Famiglietti, Felag, Gallo, Gu, Kallman, LaMountain, Lauria, Mack, McKenney, Morgan, Murray, Paolino, Patalano, Pearson, Quezada, Raptakis, Rogers, Sosnowski, Thompson, Tikoian, Ujifusa, Urso, Valverde, Vargas, and Zurier.

Senator Bell speaks on the senate resolution.

The resolution is read and passed upon a voice vote.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Upon suggestion of Senator Tikoian and by unanimous consent, the Honorable President, welcomes to the Chamber Arthur Cayo from Providence.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Senate President Valarie J. Lawson announces that the Ethics Commission will meet at the Rise of the Senate in the Senate Lounge.

TRANSMITTAL

By unanimous consent, all matters on the Secretary's desk are ordered to be transmitted to His Excellency, the Governor, the Honorable Secretary of State or to the Honorable House of Representatives forthwith.

NEW BUSINESS**Senate Resolution No. 2002****BY** Lauria, DiMario, Sosnowski, Lawson

ENTITLED, SENATE RESOLUTION EXTENDING THE REPORTING AND EXPIRATION DATES OF THE SPECIAL COMMISSION TO MAKE A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF RHODE ISLAND'S HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE RELATED TO EDUCATING AND RETAINING PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS AND ESTABLISHING A STATE MEDICAL SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND (Extends reporting and expiration dates of commission studying RI's Healthcare Workforce Relating to Educating and Retaining Primary Care Physicians and a Medical School at URI from January 2, 2026, to March 1, 2026, and expires on June 30, 2026.)
{LC3677/1}

Placed on the Senate Consent Calendar.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon the Motion of Senator Tikoian, seconded by the entire Senate, the Senate adjourns at 4:26 o'clock P.M. *in memory of Ella Cook and Mukhammad Aziz Umurzokov.*

Appendix**SENATE PRESIDENT'S OPENING DAY REMARKS****Tuesday, January 6, 2026****Valarie J. Lawson**
Senate President

Welcome back to the Senate. Happy new year to each of my colleagues, our Senate staff, and all Rhode Islanders. I hope you all enjoyed a safe, healthy, and happy holiday season.

Today, we return to the people's house, and this Senate Chamber, to continue our work for the people of Rhode Island. I want to commend each of you for your commitment to your communities, your constituents, and this state we all love.

Before we begin, I want to acknowledge last month's tragedy at Brown University. To the Brown community, which includes members of our Senate family, everyone in our state stands with you. We grieve alongside you, and we are here for you.

To all the first responders and health care professionals who have worked tirelessly: thank you for your incredible dedication, and for everything you do.

I would ask everyone to join me in a moment of silence for Ella Cook and Mukhammad Aziz Umurzokov, for the wounded victims who continue to recover, for their family and friends, for all the students, faculty, and staff at Brown ... as well as for MIT Professor Nuno Loureiro, and for everyone who has been impacted by this terrible event.

My friends, today, we begin the 2026 legislative session. We are living in an environment that presents much uncertainty, and a moment filled with many significant challenges.

I want the people of Rhode Island to know that all of us in the Senate stand ready to confront these challenges head on. Together, we will take meaningful action that improves the lives of Rhode Islanders, now and in the years to come.

We will build on the Senate's important work and the progress we have made in recent years. Our focus will be trained squarely on the urgent needs of today, along with our vision for a brighter, more prosperous tomorrow.

We have been meeting throughout the off session with a range of leaders and stakeholders to identify specific needs and develop legislative solutions. Three major areas of policy are among those we are focused on: health care, education, and small business.

In the coming weeks, we will share detailed legislation in these areas. For now, I would like to share some of our priorities and highlight key action steps we will be pursuing.

The Senate has been a leading voice on addressing Rhode Island's health care crisis ... and we will continue to embrace that role in 2026. For the well-being of our communities, and the future of our state, it is imperative that we do everything in our power to stabilize our hospitals and strengthen our health system. We must ensure care is accessible and affordable for everyone.

We have made important progress in recent years, including:

- Taking long-overdue measures to address lagging reimbursement rates;
- Providing relief for Rhode Islanders facing medical debt;
- Protecting the 340B discount prescription program;
- and much more.

In 2026, we will continue working to stabilize and strengthen Rhode Island's health care workforce, and especially our primary care providers.

That includes our ongoing study of a potential medical school at the University of Rhode Island, which would benefit our state in many ways.

We will take steps to address pharmacy benefit managers to improve transparency and lower prescription drug costs.

And we will continue our work to strengthen behavioral health supports in our state by securing dedicated, annual funding streams for the 988 and BH Link programs.

Thanks to the dedication and talent of many colleagues, education is another area in which the Senate has been a leading voice and a force for positive change.

As a career educator, this is a very personal issue for me. I believe deeply that every child in Rhode Island deserves the best possible chance for success in life.

This year, we will continue the Senate's leading work on early childhood care and education, such as by continuing the successful program that provides child care subsidies for child care providers beyond its current 2028 expiration date. And we will keep advocating for progress toward our goal of universal pre-K access for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

We will again pursue a state constitutional amendment that guarantees every Rhode Island child the right to a quality education. And we will explore changes in the education funding formula that improve fairness while supporting student success.

Our educational focus extends beyond K-12, because it is critical that we create strong pathways to success in higher education and the workforce. One proposal I hope to enact is the creation of a new Workforce Innovation Center at the Community College of Rhode Island, which would require voter approval of a bond question in November. We will also act to make the Hope Scholarship at Rhode Island College permanent.

Finally, to the small businesses that make up the backbone of our state's economy: we know that many of you are struggling. As the spouse of a small business owner, I want our state to be viewed as a place where hard-working people can realize their dreams, achieve prosperity, and expand opportunity for all Rhode Islanders.

A starting point for our work this year will be to make user-friendly improvements to the tangible tax exemption that was created through the Senate's leadership in 2023.

I know that each of you bring your own priorities, on behalf of the constituents you represent. For Rhode Island's future, let us listen to one another, learn from one another, and reaffirm our shared commitment to the shared values we cherish.

As we work together, we also must continue to look for ways to help Rhode Islanders struggling with the rising cost of living. Affordability is a major concern for Rhode Islanders.

Changes at the federal level will impact Medicaid, SNAP, and the cost of care obtained through Healthsource RI. Even as needs in the community are increasing, the state budget, through which we address many of these needs, is facing a significant deficit.

But no matter the challenge before us, when we work together, we can and will emerge stronger. I look forward to working with each of you in the weeks and months ahead.

Appendix

INVOCATION

SENATOR PETER A. APPOLLONIO. JR.

Almighty Father, as the New Year begins, let us continue the work of our previous session. We ask that You bestow a special blessing of good health and happiness on each member of this chamber and their families. Amen.

Appendix

CONSENT CALENDAR

IN ORDER FOR THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2026:

1. 2026-S 2002

BY Lauria

ENTITLED, SENATE RESOLUTION EXTENDING THE REPORTING AND EXPIRATION DATES OF THE SPECIAL COMMISSION TO MAKE A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF RHODE ISLAND'S HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE RELATED TO EDUCATING AND RETAINING PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS AND ESTABLISHING A STATE MEDICAL SCHOOL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

Ordered on the Consent Calendar.