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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>



- **Senate OKs bill to remove General Assembly from marriage process**
The Senate passed legislation ([2021-S 0014A](#)) introduced by Senate Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) that would authorize the governor to designate any adult to solemnize a marriage. A fee in the amount of \$25 would be a prerequisite and would be payable to the secretary of state, or a fee of \$20 for applications that are submitted electronically. The measure now moves to the House of Representatives, where similar legislation ([2021-H 5034](#)) has been introduced by House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence). [Click here to see news release.](#)
- **House approves bill to allow terminal patients to use experimental drugs**
The House of Representatives passed the Neil Fachon Terminally Ill Patients Right to Try Act of 2021 ([2021-H 5077](#)) introduced by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston) that would allow chronically ill patients to obtain experimental drugs that have not yet been federally approved but which may be in the final stages of FDA testing. The measure now moves to the Senate for consideration. [Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Senate OKs expanded access to telemedicine coverage**
The Senate approved legislation ([2021-S 0004Aaa](#)) sponsored by Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) to expand telemedicine coverage requirements for insurers and require that all Rhode Island Medicaid programs cover telemedicine visits — visits with health care providers via telephone or audio-video enabled device.

More...

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- **Senate approves bill to explore ‘harm reduction center’ pilot**
The Senate approved legislation ([2021-S 0016A](#)) sponsored by Senate Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Joshua Miller (D-Dist. 28, Cranston, Providence) to explore the creation of a pilot program to create “harm reduction centers” to help prevent drug overdose deaths. The centers would be supervised facilities for drug users, staffed by health care professionals who could help in cases of overdose and make treatment referrals. The bill now goes to the House, where Rep. John G. Edwards (D-Dist. 70, Tiverton, Portsmouth) is sponsoring companion legislation ([2021-H 5245](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Bill aimed at raising revenue through new marginal tax rate on high income**
Sen. Melissa Murray (D- Dist. 24, Woonsocket, North Smithfield) and Rep. Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket) have introduced legislation to raise revenue for the state by adding one new tax bracket, a marginal rate of 8.99% (in place of the current top rate of 5.99%) on income above \$475,000, ensuring the highest earners are contributing their fair share. The legislation ([2021-S 0326](#), [2021-H 5227](#)) is estimated to raise more than \$100 million in new tax revenue and would only impact the top 1% of tax filers.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **McCaffrey bill would change certain drug possession to misdemeanor**
Senate Majority Leader Michael J. McCaffrey (D-Dist. 29, Warwick) has introduced legislation ([2012-S 0188](#)) that would amend the Uniform Controlled Substances Act and reclassify simple possession of 10 grams or less of certain controlled substances as a misdemeanor punishable as a two-year misdemeanor rather than a felony.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Knight sponsors host of criminal justice reform bills**
Rep. Jason Knight (D-Dist. 67, Barrington, Warren) has introduced a number of bills aimed at addressing injustices within Rhode Island’s criminal justice system. The bills are aimed at eliminating roadblocks that, in many cases, hurt Rhode Islanders who have not been convicted of wrongdoing.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Rep. McNamara bill would extend business interruption insurance for COVID**
The House Corporations Committee heard testimony on legislation ([2021- H 5052](#)) introduced by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston) that would help businesses hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis by guaranteeing that business interruption insurance would cover their losses regardless of policy language. The bill would make certain that those who have business interruption insurance policies would be indemnified by insurance companies if they suffered a loss related to the COVID-19 pandemic during Rhode Island’s state of emergency.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Legislators announce grant for Black History curriculum for public schools**
House Speaker K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick), Rep. Anastasia P. Williams (D-Dist. 9, Providence) and Sen. Tiara Mack (D-Dist. 6, Providence) announced a \$50,000 Walmart Foundation grant to the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society to develop a Rhode Island African Heritage History Education curriculum for all public schools. Representative Williams has introduced legislation ([2021-H 5697](#)) to incorporate African Heritage History Education in all Rhode Island elementary and secondary schools. The goal is for all students to receive instruction on African Heritage History in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the history of our nation. Senator Mack will be introducing the bill in the Senate.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Rep. Giraldo bill would make conditions of employment more transparent**
Rep. Joshua J. Giraldo (D-Dist. 56, Central Falls) has introduced legislation ([2021-H 5719](#)) that would require employers, at the time of hiring, to furnish an itemized list of the terms and conditions of the worker's employment. It would also require employers to provide every employee each payday with a paystub explaining exactly how wages were calculated and the reason for each deduction.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Sugary drinks tax bill introduced to help advance public health in Rhode Island**
Sen. Valarie J. Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) and Rep. Jean Philippe Barros (D-Dist. 59, Pawtucket) have introduced legislation ([2021-S 0327](#), [2021-H 5715](#)) that would establish a tax on sugary drinks in Rhode Island. If enacted, the legislation would designate a portion of the revenues generated to expand access to nutritious food for low-income families by establishing a Retail SNAP Incentive Program that would incentivize consumption of healthy fruits and vegetables.
[Click here to see news release.](#)