

March 8, 2024

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>



- **Speaker Shekarchi announces 2024 housing legislation**
Speaker of the House K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) announced a 15-bill package of legislation regarding housing issues, his fourth comprehensive suite of housing bills since becoming Speaker in 2021. Much of the legislation stems from testimony and discussions of both the Special Legislative Commission on Affordable Housing and the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Entire Area of Land Use, which have been meeting regularly since July 2022 to address ways Rhode Island can meet its affordable housing needs in a manner that is sustainable and equitable.
[Click here to see news release](#)
- **Senate leaders unveil Rhode Island HEALTH Initiative**
Senate leaders unveiled a 25-bill legislative package aimed at improving health care access and affordability in Rhode Island. To address the challenges facing the state’s health care system, the Rhode Island HEALTH Initiative (Holistic Enhancement and Access Legislation for Total Health) focuses on four key pillars: consumer protection, provider availability and care quality, cost containment, and health system financial stability.
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- **Senate passes bill to protect patients’ pharmacy options**
The Senate passed a bill ([2024-S 2086](#)) sponsored by Sen. Linda Ujifusa (D-Dist. 11, Portsmouth, Bristol) that prohibits insurers from requiring patients to get their prescriptions from insurer-affiliated pharmacies, which are often mail order-only. That practice, referred to as “white bagging,” can delay treatment, and causes

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problems for chemotherapy patients in particular. Rep. Justine A. Caldwell (D-Dist. 30, East Greenwich, West Greenwich) is sponsoring the bill ([2024-H 7365](#)) in the House.

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- **McNamara introduces package of bills that targets chronic school absenteeism**
Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston) has submitted a package of bills that seeks to curb chronic school absenteeism. The first ([2024-H 7289](#)) would direct the Department of Education to establish a two-year pilot outreach and tracking program at two public high schools. The second ([2024-H 7290](#)) would direct each local education agency to adopt a program to monitor absenteeism data. The third ([2024-H 7195](#)) would authorize a pilot program to address issues of asthma and attendance among students. Sen. Sandra Cano (D-Dist. 8, Pawtucket) has introduced companion bills ([2024-S 2527](#), [2024-S 2533](#), [2024-S 2515](#)) in the Senate.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **East Bay Senate delegation introduces Washington Bridge update legislation**
Senate Majority Whip Valarie J. Lawson (D-Dist. 14, East Providence) and other East Bay lawmakers have introduced legislation ([2024-S 2727](#)) that would require regular monthly reports from the Rhode Island Department of Transportation on the status of the Washington Bridge. House Majority Whip Katherine S. Kazarian (D-Dist. 63, East Providence, Pawtucket) introduced similar legislation ([2024-H 7759](#)) in the House.
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- **Gu, Cortvriend introduce package of bills to strengthen shoreline access**
Sen. Victoria Gu (D-Dist. 38, Westerly, Charlestown, South Kingstown) and Rep. Terri Cortvriend (D-Dist. 72, Portsmouth, Middletown) are sponsoring legislation to increase disclosure of shoreline access rights and conditions during the purchase of oceanfront property ([2024-S 2185](#), [2024-H 7376](#)), allow towns to preserve recreation easements on abandoned roads ([2024-S 2641](#), [2024-H 7645](#)), and allow the Coastal Resources Management Council to designate historical footpaths as rights-of-way ([2024-S 2634](#), [2024-H 7750](#)).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Sanchez bill would pay health care workers overtime on Sundays and holidays**
Rhode Island hourly workers earn time-and-half when they work Sundays and holidays, unless they work in an exempt industry, such as health care. Rep. Enrique George Sanchez (D-Dist. 9, Providence) has introduced legislation ([2024-H 7789](#)) to remove that exemption for health care workers.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Solomon, LaMountain look to protect likeness rights for intercollegiate athletes**
Rep. Joseph J. Solomon Jr. (D-Dist. 22, Warwick) and Sen. Matthew L. LaMountain (D-Dist. 31, Warwick, Cranston) have introduced legislation ([2024-H 7644](#), [2024-S 2674](#)) that would prevent colleges and universities from adopting rules that limit a student athlete's right to compensation from their image or likeness.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Alzate, Cano bills would require coverage for diagnosing and treating infertility**
Rep. Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket, Central Falls) and Sen. Sandra Cano (D-Dist. 8, Pawtucket) have introduced two pieces of legislation that would mandate all insurance contracts, plans or policies to provide coverage for the expense of diagnosing and treating infertility. The first bill ([2024-H 7878](#), [2024-S 2396](#)) requires coverage for the diagnosis and treatment of infertility for women between the ages of 25 and 42 years, and the second bill ([2024-H 7877](#)) strikes out the eligibility provision that designates only women between the ages of 25 and 42 years are eligible for the reimbursement. It also includes language that would prohibit precluding any individual or couple, including same-sex couples, who are otherwise qualified for reimbursement for a test or treatment of infertility.
[Click here to see news release.](#)

- **Forest Commission drafts report suggesting increased funds, coordination**
A House commission led by Rep. Megan L. Cotter (D-Dist. 39, Exeter, Richmond, Hopkinton) that has studied forest management in Rhode Island is recommending, among other things, increased funding for forest management; mapping of public and private roads in forested areas; and increased collaboration between the state, local fire officials and landowners to better plan for fire response.

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