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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.rilin.state.ri.us/News/>.



- **Senate leaders seek immediate implementation of GED fee waivers**
President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed (D-Dist. 13, Newport, Jamestown), Senate Majority Leader Dominick J. Ruggiero (D-Dist. 4, North Providence, Providence), Senate Majority Whip Maryellen Goodwin (D-Dist. 1, Providence) and Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Hanna M. Gallo (D-Dist. 27, Cranston, West Warwick) have written to state education officials calling for immediate implementation of a law they championed last year to remove financial barriers to earning a high school equivalency credential. At \$120 per person for the full test, cost is likely a factor that may be preventing students from taking the General Educational Development (GED) exam.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Shekarchi re-introduces hiring incentive legislation**
Rep. K. Joseph Shekarchi (D-Dist. 23, Warwick) has again introduced legislation, “The Rhode Island New Qualified Jobs Incentive Act” ([2015-H 5116](#)) to make tax incentives available to companies that hire new, qualified full-time employees. Large firms that make 50 or more new hires would be eligible for a tax incentive off their net income tax rate, and smaller firms (typically partnerships or family businesses) that make 10 or more new hires would be eligible for an incentive off their personal income tax. Qualified jobs would be those paying at least 250 percent of the minimum wage, for a minimum 30-hour week.
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More...

- **Bill would offer tax credit for student loan payments**
Rep. Christopher R. Blazewski (D-Dist. 2, Providence) and Sen. Ryan W. Pearson (D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln) are sponsoring legislation ([2015-H 5086](#)) to allow college graduates to claim a tax credit for payments on their student loans as a means of keeping talented, educated people in Rhode Island and encouraging innovators to make the state their home.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Ciccone bill would grant driving privilege licenses to immigrants**
In an effort to keep the roads safer by requiring undocumented immigrants to be trained, tested and insured while driving, Sen. Frank A. Ciccone III (D-Dist. 7, Providence, North Providence) has introduced legislation ([2015-S 0053](#)) that would allow the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue driving privilege licenses to applicants unable to establish a lawful presence in the United States.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Panel to begin studying charter school funding fairness**
A new special legislative commission began studying Rhode Island's school funding formula to determine whether its methods for funding the education of students in charter schools unfairly burdens local school districts. The 12-member commission, led by Rep. Jeremiah T. O'Grady (D-Dist. 46, Lincoln, Pawtucket), is charged with studying the funding formula to determine whether the per-pupil share of local school funding that school districts must remit to charter schools accepting their students is calculated in a way that shifts funding from costs that do not move with the student.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Fellela bill would make it a felony to threaten schools via computer**
Rep. Deborah Fellela (D-Dist. 43, Johnston) has submitted a bill ([2015-H 5068](#)) that would prohibit the use of a computer, phone, smart phone, tablet, fax machine, social media or any like device to make any statements or threats concerning the endangerment of students at any public or private day care facility, preschool, school, college or university in the state.
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Walaska bill would amend auto tax valuation method**
Sen. William A. Walaska (D-Dist. 30, Warwick) has introduced legislation ([2015-S 0023](#)) aimed at easing the automobile excise tax levied in cities and towns. The bill calls for vehicles to be assessed based on the average trade-in price of the vehicle, rather than the clean retail value that is currently used, and would extend from 30 to 45 days the amount of time an auto owner has to appeal a tax bill. Similar legislation regarding vehicle valuations ([2015-H 5112](#)) has been introduced in the House by Rep. Joseph M. McNamara (D-Dist. 19, Warwick, Cranston).
[Click here to see news release.](#)
- **Sen. Lombardi bill would OK polling place bake sales**
Responding to the situation that arose at Cranston polling places last November – when the Elections Board barred PTO bake sales at the polls as a violation of state law – Sen. Frank S. Lombardi (D-Dist. 26, Cranston) has introduced legislation

([2015-S 0058](#)) to permit bake sales to be held at voting locations “as long as conduct does not interfere with the orderly conduct of the scheduled election.”

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **Hull bill calls for labeling of genetically modified products**

Rep. Raymond A. Hull (D-Dist. 6, Providence, North Providence) has introduced legislation ([2015-H 5078](#)) to add a definition to state law relative to genetically engineered products. The bill calls for rules for labeling products, whether packaged food or a raw agricultural commodity, that contain genetically engineered ingredients (also referred to as GMOs, for genetically modified organisms). Similar legislation is expected to be introduced in the Senate by Sen. Donna M. Nesselbush (D-Dist. 15, Pawtucket, North Providence) and Sen. William A. Walaska (D-Dist. 30, Warwick).

[Click here to see news release.](#)

▪ **Rep. Lombardi wants voters to consider longer terms, term limits for legislators**

Rep. John J. Lombardi (D-Dist. 8, Providence) has introduced legislation ([2015-H 5031](#)) that would place before voters at the 2016 general election a proposal to amend the state constitution to lengthen state legislator terms from two years to four years and to limit legislator service to three consecutive terms (12 years).

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