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THIS YEAR AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE HOUSE — Here are the highlights from news and events that took place in the General Assembly this year. For more information on any of these items visit

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HEALTH CARE

- The state budget bolsters primary care by putting more than \$40 million — \$15 million in state funding, the rest from federal sources — toward [Medicaid rate increases for primary care providers](#). The budget also provides that a primary care rate review be completed by September 1, 2026.
- The General Assembly created a three-year pilot program prohibiting insurers from [requiring prior authorization](#) for medically necessary health care services ordered by patients' primary care providers.
- The General Assembly helped patients [get their prescriptions expeditiously](#) in situations when their prescriber can't be reached, or when their insurers want to substitute equivalent drugs or devices.
- The state budget added \$38 million over the governor's proposal for [hospital reimbursement rates](#) and direct support payments.
- The budget added \$12 million above the governor's proposal to increase [reimbursement rates at nursing homes](#) as part of its revision to the safe staffing law.
- The General Assembly tripled the amount of non-opioid, non-narcotic Schedule II prescription drugs — [including most commonly prescribed ADHD medications](#) — that can be dispensed at one time, allowing up to a 90-day supply.
- The General Assembly protected a [critical discount pharmaceutical program](#), known as 340B, that enables safety-net hospitals, clinics and other health care agencies to provide care to the most vulnerable Rhode Islanders.

- The state budget includes \$500,000 to support Thundermist Health Center's Family Medicine Residency Program to help train and retain primary care providers.
- The Assembly provided stable funding for mobile [youth crisis response](#) teams by requiring private insurance to cover their services, and the state budget incorporated [funding to cover these services for Medicaid recipients](#).
- The General Assembly established several consumer protections related to [Medicare supplemental insurance plans](#). The budget also expanded the Medicare Savings program to give more beneficiaries access to assistance with premiums and co-pays.
- Lawmakers permanently removed a sunset provision to permanently allow licensed [physical therapists in Rhode Island](#) to order diagnostic imaging.
- The legislature helped [internationally trained physicians](#) acquire medical licenses by eliminating barriers such as repeating residency programs.
- The General Assembly established a [clinician wellness and support program](#) for physicians, physician assistants, dentists and podiatrists to address burnout, substance abuse, and mental and physical health.
- Legislators allowed Rhode Island to join the [state dietitian licensure compact](#).
- Lawmakers increased [insurance coverage for hearing aids](#).
- Lawmakers passed the David Casey Act to mandate automatic external [defibrillators on golf courses](#).
- The legislature established a [Rare Disease Advisory Council](#) within the Department of Health.
- The General Assembly [regulated the distribution of kratom](#), a natural substance used by people to overcome opioid addiction, withdrawal, and to treat anxiety, depression and other ailments.
- The General Assembly gave the director of the Department of Health the authority to approve or deny any [applications for professional licensure](#) pending before certain boards of licensure that have been unable to establish a quorum for 30 business days.
- The legislature capped medical debt interest rates and prohibited [attachment of a lien](#) to a person's home due to medical debt.
- The General Assembly clarified state law to [enable pharmacists to administer](#) influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations to patients over the age of 3.

HOUSING

- The state budget [increased support for programs](#) to help Rhode Islanders experiencing homelessness, and provided dedicated on-going resources, for a total of \$8.5 million.
- Legislators made various improvements to Rhode Island's Low and Moderate Income Housing Act [to encourage the construction of homes](#) working families can afford.
- The General Assembly required municipalities to provide for [village or mixed-use zoning](#) to allow residential use in some or all areas of commercial zoning districts.

- Lawmakers made it easier for [homeowners' associations to purchase land](#) that its members are currently leasing.
- The General Assembly created a [Housing Champion program](#) to reward municipalities that are actively working to address Rhode Island's housing crisis.
- The state legislature created a [land bank](#) within the Rhode Island Housing and Mortgage Finance Corporation to accept property for redevelopment into housing.
- The General Assembly enabled municipalities to allow for the use of [co-housing arrangements](#) as energy-efficient, low-cost housing options.
- Lawmakers allowed flexibility on the [tax levy cap for communities](#) when new housing is built, provided the new housing meets criteria including affordability requirements.
- The General Assembly ensured that [some multi-family housing development](#) is allowed in areas within Rhode Island's Urban Services Boundary that have available public water and sewer capacity.
- The General Assembly encouraged the development of [attached single family homes](#), such as townhomes, which can offer more affordable opportunities in Rhode Island's housing market.
- The legislature clarified the processes set forth in the Zoning Enabling Act and Subdivision Act and [corrected issues that are creating unnecessary delays](#) and/or red tape.
- The General Assembly allowed those purchasing property [to rely on the zoning certificates](#) or opinions they receive from local officials.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- The General Assembly [banned the sale of certain military-style weapons](#) in Rhode Island.
- Lawmakers established a ["PURPLE Alert" system](#) to help quickly find missing adults with serious disabilities whose health and safety is at risk.
- The General Assembly aided law enforcement in [solving gun-related crimes](#) by taking advantage of a national ballistics analysis database.
- The General Assembly required all full-time lifeguards, park and forest rangers who work at any public beach or facility to be trained in [administering opioid antagonists](#), such as Narcan.
- Lawmakers made it a crime to [attempt to kidnap a minor](#).
- The General Assembly required hotel employees and short-term rental property operators to annually receive [human trafficking awareness training](#), and required [commercial drivers to receive instruction](#) on trafficking recognition and prevention as part of their training.
- The legislature made it a misdemeanor to make [threats to election officials](#), which includes election workers, poll workers, wardens, moderators and the board of canvassers.
- Legislators charged the Cannabis Control Commission with [studying the proliferation of hemp THC-infused beverages](#) and make a recommendation to the Assembly by March 2026.

- Lawmakers increased penalties for [driving the wrong way](#) on a highway or an entrance/exit ramp.
- The General Assembly required all colleges and universities in the state to train all resident assistants (RAs) in [administering opioid antagonists](#) and to keep a supply available to them at all times.

LABOR

- The General Assembly increased [Rhode Island's minimum wage](#) from \$15 to \$17 over a two-year period.
- The state legislature [expanded the wage replacement rate](#) provided through the Temporary Disability Insurance, or TDI, and the Temporary Caregiver Insurance, or TCI, programs, and expanded TCI so that siblings qualify as caregivers.
- Legislators included casinos in the state's law [prohibiting smoking](#) in workplaces.
- The General Assembly updated fair employment practices to support women [experiencing menopause](#).
- The state legislature protected [employees' free speech](#) in the workplace by prohibiting so-called "captive audience" meetings.
- Lawmakers ensured that construction workers can safely exit and enter their jobsites by [prohibiting the locking of exits and entrances](#) while workers are present.
- The General Assembly required employers to provide all employees, at the start of their employment, with a [written notice detailing the terms and conditions](#) of their job — including pay, benefits, deductions, and work policies.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

- The legislature repealed the law that allows [payday lending](#) to operate in Rhode Island.
- The General Assembly protected Rhode Islanders from a rapidly growing category of [scams that use cryptocurrency ATMs](#) to defraud victims.
- The General Assembly prohibited an [unfair real estate practice](#) that is often targeted at older homeowners, sometimes resulting in a lien against their property or other problems.
- Lawmakers required [all licensed contractor applicants](#) to provide a valid ID.
- The General Assembly clarified how [self-storage facilities](#) may sell the contents of abandoned units.
- The General Assembly prevented insurance companies from increasing a policyholder's premium for [asking about the terms of a policy](#).

GOVERNMENT

- The General Assembly adopted the [Anti-Bid Rigging Act](#) to bring fairness to Rhode Island's bidding process for entities that contract with the state.

- The General Assembly required [nonprofit organizations to disclose their top salaries](#) before receiving grants or funding from the General Assembly.
- The General Assembly named the Rhode Island Senate chamber in memory of the late [Senate President Dominick J. Ruggerio](#).
- The Assembly regulated the use of [synthetic media in elections](#).
- Lawmakers required the Retirement Board of the Employees Retirement System to [publish recordings of its meetings](#).
- The General Assembly [extended the deadline for candidates](#) to request a recount so that all overseas ballots are counted before the deadline passes. The bill now goes to the governor.
- Lawmakers approved legislation allowing any voter who wishes to sign up to [automatically receive a mail ballot application](#).
- The state legislature overhauled and updated the [Public Records Administration](#) Act.

EDUCATION

- Lawmakers required every school in Rhode Island to have a policy on the use of personal electronics that [prohibits students from having access](#) to them during the school day.
- The state budget added \$16.5 million in education aid to the governor's proposal to cover data updates and some increased allocation through special education categorical funding, for a total of [\\$59 million above the current year's level for education aid](#).
- The General Assembly made federally mandated school [504 plans](#) part of state law. A 504 plan is a formal plan for how a school will remove barriers so a student with a disability can learn alongside peers in general education.
- Legislators helped [address teacher shortages](#) in Rhode Island's public schools by allowing retired teachers to substitute in excess of 90 days.
- The General Assembly required school districts to accurately track data related to [career and technical education programs](#).
- The General Assembly allowed [more passengers on vans](#) that are used to transport public school pupils.
- Legislators extended a state program that [subsidizes child care for child care providers](#).
- The budget approved by the legislators included \$3 million to provide an [infant rate for center-based child care providers](#) that is 20 percent higher than the toddler rate starting July 1.
- The General Assembly required [athletic trainers to be trained](#) in using, and be equipped with, epi-pens.
- The General Assembly protected [tuition savings plans](#) from judicial attachment irrespective of the state in which the account was opened.
- The legislature allowed teachers in public schools to hold a brief [moment of silence to recognize the anniversary of the tragic attacks of Sept. 11, 2001](#).

SOCIAL PROTECTIONS

- Lawmakers passed the [Freedom to Read Act](#) protecting libraries and their patrons from partisan or doctrinal book-banning efforts and affirm the free speech rights of authors, publishers and readers in Rhode Island.
- The General Assembly prohibited discrimination on the basis of race by expanding the definition to include traits historically associated with race, such as hair texture and [protective hairstyles](#).
- The General Assembly required [universal changing stations](#) in new public buildings.
- Lawmakers created the [Rhode Island Baby Bond Trust](#), a step toward closing the racial wealth gap and expanding opportunity for Rhode Island's most vulnerable children.
- The General Assembly allowed individuals with special needs or sensory-related disorders or differences to [receive hair care services within their home](#).
- The legislature passed legislation prohibiting [landlords](#) and [health care facilities](#) from inquiring about a tenant or patient's immigration status.
- The General Assembly required the Department of Administration to provide a [list of minority-owned businesses](#) to all contractors of state-funded public construction projects.

TRANSPORTATION

- The state budget dedicated a 2-cents-per-gallon increase to the gasoline tax and additional allocations of other transportation revenues, which is expected to provide about \$15 million to the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, to help [RIPTA with its budget](#) with its budget shortfall.
- The legislators provided an additional \$22 million in the budget from Rhode Island Capital Plan funds for the updated state match needed based on the increased costs for the replacement of the westbound span of the [Washington Bridge](#). The contract was awarded in June, with construction starting in July.
- The General Assembly implemented a [30-day waiting period](#) following the issuance of a learner's permit before taking a road test in order to obtain a full license for anyone over the age of 18.
- The legislature created a [Rhode Island Greek Heritage license plate](#) in conjunction with the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association.

ENVIRONMENT

- The legislature professionalized the composition of the [Coastal Resources Management Council](#) by reducing the council's composition from 10 members to seven who possess background, qualifications and expertise in environmental matters.
- The General Assembly [revived a state board](#) that brings together leaders in land conservation, construction and affordable housing to promote sustainable housing growth throughout Rhode Island.

- Lawmakers required anyone applying for a permit to spread biosolids on land to first [test the material for PFAS](#) — per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances.
- The General Assembly prohibited the manufacture, sale or distribution of any firefighting personal protective equipment containing [intentionally added PFAS](#) chemicals in Rhode Island.
- The General Assembly created a [public outreach campaign](#) about textile recycling.
- The legislature created a license for the [harvesting of green crabs](#), an invasive species in Rhode Island’s coastal waters.
- The state budget includes \$1.5 million in restricted receipts to fund the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4).

BUSINESS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The General Assembly allowed public utilities to purchase [clean, safe nuclear power](#), at a competitive cost from out-of-state facilities.
- The General Assembly [lifted a restriction on the investments](#) of insurance corporations to enable them to grow in Rhode Island.
- Lawmakers enabled the [Matunuck Oyster Bar](#) to operate outdoors this summer on a temporary basis due to a fire that destroyed the facility.

MUNICIPAL

- [Funding for distressed communities](#) was raised by \$2.5 million over the governor’s proposal.
- An increase in the general [real estate conveyance tax](#) includes monies directed to municipalities.
- The budget fully funded [library aid and the Payment in Lieu of Taxes \(PILOT\) program](#).
- Municipalities will receive additional revenue from the [local hotel tax](#), which will be doubled from 1 percent to 2 percent, and will also benefit from the new tax on whole-home short-term rentals.
- The General Assembly granted the South Kingstown Town Council the authority to enact a [homestead exemption](#) ordinance.
- The General Assembly created a commission to study and prepare a report on the return of [Central Falls schools](#) to local governance.
- The General Assembly authorized the Warwick City Council to create a budget commission for [Warwick Public Schools](#).
- The General Assembly enabled the [burying of high-voltage power lines](#) between Bold Point Park in East Providence and India Point Park in Providence.

VETERANS and MILITARY

- Legislators protected [veterans filing for disability benefits](#) with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Lawmakers [waived the fee for vehicle identification number](#) (VIN) inspections for veterans and active-duty military personnel.
- The General Assembly gave Rhode Island Family Court concurrent jurisdiction on [juvenile cases arising on military bases](#) and installations located in Rhode Island.
- The General Assembly allowed [Rhode Island Bronze Star Medal recipients](#) to apply for a special license plate without paying a registration fee or service charge.
- Lawmakers renamed the [Sakonnet Bridge](#) as the “Staff Sergeant Christopher Potts Sakonnet River Bridge.”
- The General Assembly renamed the East Bay Bike Path Bridge located in Warren as the [Cpl. Richard C. Brule Bridge](#).
- The General Assembly authorized the Providence City Council to increase the [veterans tax exemption](#).

ANIMAL PROTECTION

- Rhode Island joined the many places that [prohibit the declawing of cats](#) under legislation approved by the General Assembly.
- The General Assembly codified standards for the [pet insurance industry](#).
- The legislature [stiffened the penalties for animal abuse](#), particularly the practice of holding animal fights.