

# RHODE ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2016

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/BUSINESS

- The General Assembly approved a proposal that will repair more than 150 structurally deficient bridges and make repairs to another 500 bridges to prevent them from becoming deficient, bringing 90 percent of the state's bridges into structural sufficiency by 2024.
- Lawmakers added another reduction in the state's minimum corporate tax to help small businesses. It was reduced from \$450 to \$400.
- The legislature passed a plan to restructure the unemployment insurance taxes paid by employers, saving them an estimated \$30 million.
- A proposal to transfer Twin River's operations at Newport Grand to a new facility in Tiverton was passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by the governor. The measure is pending approval from voters statewide and in Tiverton.
- The General Assembly passed a bill that would regulate transportation network companies such as Uber and Lyft by requiring the companies to obtain permits and certain background checks, and would set minimum insurance requirements.
- Lawmakers approved legislation that seeks to eliminate patent trolls by prohibiting a person or company from making bad faith assertions of patent infringement against a Rhode Island business or individual.
- The legislature approved a bill that will help small business by modernizing administrative practices utilizing the Model State Administrative Procedures Act.
- The General Assembly passed legislation to allow breweries and distilleries to sell limited amounts of their products to visitors for sampling and off-site consumption.
- Lawmakers passed a bill to regulate the business relationship between pharmacy service providers and group health insurers to streamline the process that pharmacy benefit managers use to update pricing information for prescription drugs.
- The legislature established the Micro Business Act to carry out the state's policy of supporting the fullest possible participation of micro businesses in the economic activity in the state, including state-directed public construction programs and projects, and in-state purchases of goods and services.

## ELECTIONS/GOOD GOVERNMENT

- Legislators placed a question on November's ballot asking voters to restore the Ethics Commission's jurisdiction over the General Assembly.
- A new law will allow online voter registration.
- Lawmakers enacted lobbying reform to increase transparency and make the lobbying reporting and information system more user-friendly.
- Legislators approved reforms to campaign finance laws to include entities advocating for or against questions or charter changes presented locally at town meetings or by referendum.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

- The General Assembly unanimously voted to make it a crime to electronically track a vehicle without the consent of the owner. The bill is aimed primarily at protecting victims of stalkers and domestic violence.
- Legislators approved legislation which requires the surrender of firearms within 24 hours by anyone who is either convicted of a felony charge of domestic violence or pleads no contest.
- Lawmakers passed legislation that would make anyone convicted of sex trafficking be subject to the Rhode Island's sex offender registration and community notification statute.
- Legislation passed creating the domestic violence prevention fund. It will be administered by the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and it would be used to pay for evidence-based programs designed to prevent domestic and dating violence throughout Rhode Island.
- The General Assembly passed legislation requiring institutions of higher learning to adopt a policy which grants amnesty for violations of drug/alcohol policies for those who report incidents of violence, including domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and sexual assault.
- Legislators approved bills requiring the E-911 Uniform Emergency telephone system division to update the system by allowing users to access the system by text, video and other methods.
- The General Assembly passed legislation that enables and explicitly authorizes municipalities to regulate unlicensed massage parlors and services within its borders in response to illegal sex trafficking operations disguised as massage parlors or bodyworks establishments.
- Lawmakers passed legislation giving the state, through the Rhode Island Airport Corporation, the exclusive legal authority to regulate the use of drones in Rhode Island.

## **JUSTICE**

- The General Assembly passed legislation that requires training for law enforcement officers on mental health and substance abuse emergencies.
- Lawmakers approved legislation allowing Rhode Island residents who are victims of a domestic terrorist attack outside of Rhode Island, but still within the United States, to be eligible to receive victim's compensation payments from RI's Crime Victim Compensation Fund.
- The General Assembly passed legislation supporting the "Fitting the Description" movement and requiring law enforcement to automatically destroy all arrest records for those who are victims of mistaken or wrongful arrests.

## **EDUCATION**

- Lawmakers fully funded the education aid formula for the sixth consecutive year, increasing total funding by \$49.3 million over this year. Legislators made some adjustments to provide more equity between districts and charter schools, and to provide relief to districts with high concentrations of English language learners.

- Lawmakers gave municipalities a say in the approval of new charter schools that are part of a network.
- The budget bill includes a tuition freeze at the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island.
- Lawmakers added a performance-based component to the state funding formulas for CCRI, RIC and URI.
- Legislators approved a requirement that schools teaching kindergarten through grade 5 provide at least 20 minutes of free-play recess daily.
- A new law requires schools to teach students about the Holocaust and genocides by the time they graduate.
- Legislators required school superintendents to review discipline data to determine whether discipline is being unequally meted out to students based on race, ethnicity or disability status and respond to any disparities.
- Legislation passed by the Assembly empowers the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority to issue bonds to allow the refinancing and consolidation of existing eligible student loans.
- Legislators added a requirement that elementary schools provide targeted assistance for students with dyslexia, and required the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide appropriate training to teachers.
- A new law created a “biliteracy seal” that school districts can affix to the diplomas and transcripts of high school graduates who demonstrate proficiency in another language in addition to English.

### **CONSUMER/QUALITY OF LIFE**

- The budget provides a state tax exemption for the first \$15,000 of retirement income for Social Security-age retirees who make less than \$80,000 individually or \$100,000 for joint tax filers.
- Lawmakers approved the Electric Supplier Consumer Bill of Rights to protect electricity customers.
- The budget reduced state beach parking fees to 2011 levels, cutting most by half.
- Legislators made it possible for nonprofit organizations to purchase foreclosed homes and sell them back to their owners with more affordable mortgages.
- Lawmakers made it easier for struggling families, particularly those transitioning from homelessness to permanent housing, to earn forgiveness for utility debt.
- Legislators made changes to the way electric and gas utilities’ capital costs are considered by the Public Utilities Commission, which could translate to lower rates for customers.

### **HEALTH**

- Lawmakers approved a wide-ranging package of bills aimed at addressing the region’s crisis of opioid abuse and overdoses.
- The Good Samaritan Prevention Act was reinstated and expanded to legally protect those who seek medical assistance for drug overdose victims.

- Lawmakers approved numerous changes to the medical marijuana program, including expanding it to allow its use by post-traumatic stress disorder patients.
- A new law expands Rhode Islanders' insurance coverage for experimental uses of prescription drugs.
- Legislators directed the Department of Health to use federal grants for copper and lead testing of the water supply systems of each local government as well as public schools and licensed daycare facilities.
- Lawmakers made freestanding emergency care centers subject to the same regulatory requirements as other health-care facilities.
- Legislators required insurers to cover telemedicine services.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

- Lawmakers closed a loophole in abuse reporting laws to ensure that schools report allegations of sexual abuse of children to the Department of Children, Youth and Families.
- Legislators approved legislation requiring DCYF to disclose basic information whenever any child dies or suffers a near fatality as a result of abuse or neglect — whether or not that child was in state care — within six months of the incident.
- The General Assembly banned any form of alcohol other than in an ingestible liquid state, such as powdered form.
- The Family Home Visiting Act was enacted and calls for the Rhode Island Department of Health to work with the Department of Human Services and the Department of Children, Youth and Families to develop and coordinate the standards for a system of early childhood home visiting services that would meet the needs of the state's most vulnerable families with young children.
- Legislation was approved requiring every public and private school in Rhode Island to post a clear and visible sign for students that provide the state's child abuse hotline number.
- The General Assembly passed the Foster Parents' Bill of Rights and requires that copies be given to all foster parents at each licensing interval.
- Lawmakers approved legislation which allows grandparents with custody of their grandchildren to petition the courts for adoption without the noncustodial parents' consent.
- Legislation passed which mandates that public and private high and middle schools, and athletic fields and other locations where sporting events are held, maintain functional AEDs on site at all times.
- Legislators approved bills mandating that school departments permit each school within their jurisdiction to maintain epinephrine in cartridge injections to administer on an emergency basis to students.

## **VETERANS**

- The General Assembly passed legislation which requires healthcare providers to give veterans their medical records at no cost if they are used to apply for any kind of benefits.
- Legislation that enhances and protects employment rights for Rhode Island's veterans and members of the National Guard passed the General Assembly.
- Lawmakers approved legislation prohibiting insurers from refusing to insure, limiting coverage available, charging a reinstatement fee, or increasing the premiums for automobile insurance because a person failed to maintain insurance for a vehicle due to active duty in the armed forces of the United States.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL**

- The General Assembly passed legislation to expand several renewable energy initiatives by extending the Renewable Energy Fund for five years, making more projects eligible for long-term, fixed rate pricing, exempting residential renewable energy systems and those used in manufacturing from taxation and establishing a statewide tax rate for commercial renewable energy systems.
- Lawmakers declared a state policy goal of having 50 percent of solid waste at the state landfill be diverted through diversion, source reduction, reuse, recycling or composting by 2025.
- The General Assembly approved legislation that establishes the Rhode Island Clean Diesel Fund, which will save local trucking companies money in freight operation costs while also protecting our environment from needless and harmful diesel emissions.
- Lawmakers passed the Rhode Island Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grants Program to increase the economic competitiveness of Rhode Island-grown agricultural products and local seafood.

## **ANIMAL PROTECTION**

- The General Assembly approved legislation that increases the punishment of animal abusers from two years to five years of possible imprisonment and from ten hours of community service to fifty hours of community service.
- Lawmakers approved a bill that prohibits the possession, sale or trade of shark fins by those without a permit and would make those in violation of the act guilty of a misdemeanor.
- The state legislature passed a law prohibiting the use of bullhooks or similar devices designed to inflict pain for the purpose of training or controlling the behavior of elephants in traveling shows.