**Last Week At the State House**

The vote on H.7244, An Act Relating to Towns and Cities, was postponed. The bill would authorize the town of Cumberland to require the registration of wholesale, retail, commercial, professional service or manufacturing businesses situated in Cumberland. This does not mean the bill is dead, it could come back at a later date.

**This Week At the State House**

Monday, February 12th

Washington Bridge Oversight Hearing – Department of Transportation Director Peter Alviti, Jr. Joseph Almond, the Governor’s Deputy Chief of Staff and Jeffrey Klein, Director of Structural Engineering for VHB Engineering are scheduled to appear before the House and Senate Oversight Committees Monday at 3:00 in Room 35 of the State House. The three panelists will give a presentation on the closure of the west bound side of the Washington Bridge, including the timeline and decision-making process of the closure, the Department's response to the closure, and next steps. The meeting will be televised by Capitol Television on: Cox Communications, channels 15 and 61 for high definition; i3Broadband (Formerly Full Channel) on 15; and Verizon, on channel 34. Livestreaming is available at [**https://capitoltvri.cablecast.tv**](https://capitoltvri.cablecast.tv/)

Tuesday, February 13th

***With the potential of a winter storm predicted for Monday night into Tuesday evening, the hearings for Tuesday could be cancelled. Written testimony can still be submitted through email to the appropriate committee. However, if you plan to attend a hearing in person, please check this website for any schedule changes:*** <https://status.rilegislature.gov/legislative_committee_calendar.aspx>

At approximately 4:30, the House Judiciary Committee is meeting in the House Lounge. One bill of interest is H.7170, An Act Relating to Criminal Procedure – Identification and Apprehension of Criminals. The bill prohibits the state or any agency, from denying any person employment based on a prior criminal conviction *and prohibits the state from disqualifying any person from engaging in any occupation for which a license, permit or certificate of registration is required based on a prior conviction*. Unless a particular state law or federal law requires an employer to ask about prior convictions, any state or private employer may not ask about criminal history “until such prospective employee has been deemed otherwise qualified for the position.” At that point, a state entity or agency can deny employment or licensure, registration or permit if the crime is related to the occupation and after taking into consideration the degree of rehabilitation and the time that has elapsed since the conviction. The bill does not specifically state that a private employer cannot deny employment; but it does say “If a conviction of a crime is used as a basis for rejection of an applicant, such rejection shall be in writing and specifically state the grounds presented and reasons for rejection. A copy of such rejection shall be sent by registered mail to the applicant.” One last provision of the bill states that once an individual completes a suspended sentence, a probationary sentence or deferred or suspended sentence, and that person is not subject to sexual offender registration, then the Department of Probation and Parole must issue to the person a certificate of rehabilitation which can be used when applying for employment. <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7170.pdf>

Testimony on H.7170 may be email to HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov

Wednesday, February 14th

House Labor has a number of employer/employee related bills on its Wednesday docket.

There will be a quick vote to pass H.7058, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Posting of Veterans’ Benefits and Services. The bill requires employers with more than 50 employees to display a poster containing information about benefits available. The Department of Labor and Training is responsible for creating the poster and making it available to employers. If passed, the law would become effective January 1, 2025.

H.7171, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Temporary Disability Insurance, increases the weekly dependance allowance provided under TDI/TCI to increase from $10 to $20 or 7% of the benefit rate, whichever is greater. The bill also expands the TCI benefit to cover employees who wish to take time to care for a sibling (including half-siblings and foster siblings), a grandchild or a “care recipient.” A “care recipient” is defined as ***“a person for whom the employee is responsible for providing or arranging health or safety related care, including, but not limited to, helping the person obtain diagnostic, preventive, routine, or therapeutic health treatment.”*** Lastly, the TCI benefit increases to 12 weeks in a benefit year beginning January 1, 2025. This benefit was first extended to employees in 2014 at 4 weeks. It increased to 5 weeks in 2022 and to 6 weeks in 2023. The employer is required to hold the job for the employee that is on leave. The Chamber strongly encourages you to contact your legislators on this bill, as well as the Senate version – S.2121. Both bills are being pushed heavily by the advocates and are under consideration. <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7171.pdf>

H.7320 covers workers in a warehouse environment. The bill, An Act Relating to Labor Relations – Warehouse Worker Protection Act, requires employers to provide each employee of a warehouse distribution center, at the time of hiring, a written description of quotas related to the employee with defined time periods and any adverse actions that may happen should the employee fail to meet the quota. Employees may also request from the employer a copy of the employee's own speed data as well as the aggregated work speed data for comparable employees working in the facility. <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7320.pdf>

H.7458, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Fair Employment Practices, changes the definition of employee, for the purposes of the Fair Employment Practices Act, to include apprentices, volunteers and unpaid interns. Employers could not discriminate against them, must provide disability accommodations, protect them from harassment in the workplace, and all other protections and remedies afforded under Rhode Island General Laws 28-5. <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7458.pdf>

Written Testimony for bills heard in House Labor may be emailed to HouseLabor@rilegislature.gov

Thursday, February 15th

The House Finance Committee will be taking testimony on portions of 3 Articles of the Governor’s budget at 4:00 pm in Room 35.

Article 3, Section 16 changes, for the year 2024 only, the date the Department of Labor determines the unemployment insurance tax rate from September 30th, to “any date between September 30 and December 31, at the discretion of the Director.” In another section of the budget, the Governor asks for the authority to move unspent ARPA monies to other areas – including the unemployment trust fund. If a transfer is made, changing the tax rate setting day could be beneficial to the business community.

Article 6, Section 1 proposes to provide relief to Manufacturers that also must obtain a rectifier’s license or other state license to perform operations. The fee for the additional licenses would be waived. Article 6, Section 2 eliminates the $25 fee for real estate brokers and salespersons that move from one firm to another. Article 6, Section 12 reduces the corporate minimum tax from $400 to $350 starting January 1, 2025. It also calls for changes to the state tax credit definition which is the amount of tax paid by the pass-through entity level that is passed through to an owner. The Governor proposes to change the definition starting January 1, 2025 from one hundred percent (100%), to “ninety percent (90%) of the amount of tax paid by the pass-through entity at the entity level that is passed through to an owner on a pro rata basis.” The last portion of section 12 addresses the State’s business combined reporting statute. The language appears to allow for a net operating loss carry forward of 20 years instead of the current 10 years.

Article 7 – Economic Development proposes to expand “The Innovate Rhode Island Small Business Program.” The program was created to assist small businesses apply for the federal Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer program. Article 7 also includes an increase in reimbursements to companies participating in the bioscience and engineering internship program. The Article would allow small businesses that are employee-owned businesses and worker-cooperatives to participate in the State’s Innovation Initiative Program. Lastly, Article 7 extends the sunset provision of a number of economic development programs to December 31, 2025: Rebuild RI Tax Credit, RI Tax Increment Financing, Tax Stabilization Incentive, First Wave Closing Fund, I-195 Redevelopment Project Fund, Small Business Assistance Program, Stay Invested in RI Wavemaker Fellowship, Main Street RI Streetscape Improvement Fund, Innovation Initiative, High School, College and Employer Partnerships, Air Service Development Fund, and RI New Qualified Jobs Incentive Act of 2015

Written testimony can be emailed to the committee at HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov

The following new bills have been filed:

Senate Bill No. [2257](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2257.pdf) Ujifusa, DiPalma, Pearson, Mack, Bissaillon, LaMountain, Miller, Cano, Britto**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW -- GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS -- DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES (Provide that advertising goods that don't include a price referencing all mandatory fees and charges shall be a deceptive trade practice.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2257.pdf>

House Bill No. [7515](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7515.pdf) Boylan, Bennett, Spears, Carson, McGaw, Fogarty, Handy, Knight, Cortvriend, Donovan**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- MICROPLASTICS REDUCTION ACT (Prohibits a manufacturer from selling, offering for sale, or distributing into commerce any product containing synthetic polymer micro particles beginning January 1, 2028.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7515.pdf>

House Bill No. [7521](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7521.pdf) Baginski, Carson, Boylan**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- AUTOMATED DECISION TOOLS -- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (Creates requirements for the developers or deployers of artificial intelligence and allows civil action against these developers or deployers by the attorney general and local solicitors.

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7521.pdf>

House Bill No. [7528](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7528.pdf) Solomon, J. Brien, Kazarian, Dawson, Craven**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEDURE -- PROCEDURE GENERALLY -- DECISIONS, SPECIAL FINDINGS AND ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGES (Adds the doctrine of assumption of risk to the current comparative negligence statute.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7528.pdf>

House Bill No. [7530](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7530.pdf) Alzate, Edwards, Kazarian, Voas, Potter, Cruz, Corvese**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HOLIDAYS AND DAYS OF SPECIAL OBSERVANCE -- WORK ON HOLIDAYS AND SUNDAYS (Amends the current law so that, aside from any existing contract, all laborers, mechanics, and workers who are required to work on Sundays and/or holidays be paid by their employers at least one and one-half (1½) times the normal rate of pay.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7530.pdf>

House Bill No. [7531](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7531.pdf) Felix, Edwards, Alzate, Batista, McNamara, Cardillo, Sanchez, Henries, Potter, Morales**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- MINIMUM WAGES (Commencing 1/1/25, gradually increases the minimum wage for employees receiving gratuities from the current ($3.89) to ($14.95) by 1/1/29 and on 1/1/30 the minimum wage shall be no less than the minimum wage established by the minimum wage law.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7531.pdf>

House Bill No. [7533](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7533.pdf) Corvese, Noret, Azzinaro, Solomon, Baginski, J. Brien, McNamara, Phillips, DeSimone**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- LEAD HAZARD MITIGATION (Requires renovation projects of pre-1978 buildings to comply with provisions of chapter 24.6 of title 23 and chapter 21 of title 28, and require presence of lead inspector and supervisor and require lead training. DLT would ensure compliance.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7533.pdf>

House Bill No. [7551](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7551.pdf) Nardone, Rea, P. Morgan, Quattrocchi**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (Repeals the sunset for the small business assistance program and permanently extends the program beyond the scheduled expiration date of December 31, 2024.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7551.pdf>

House Bill No. [7574](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7574.pdf) Finkelman**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEDURE -- PROCEDURE GENERALLY -- THIRD-PARTY LITIGATION FINANCING CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT (Comprehensively regulates the practices of third-party litigation financers in Rhode Island.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7574.pdf>

House Bill No. [7579](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7579.pdf) Morales, Potter, Cruz, Giraldo, Voas, J. Lombardi, Handy, Spears, Donovan, Sanchez**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- MINIMUM WAGES (Increases the state minimum wage by $1.25 per year from 2026 through 2029 when it would reach twenty dollars ($20.00) per hour and then provides for subsequent annual adjustments based on the Consumer Price Index.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7579.pdf>

House Bill No. [7580](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7580.pdf) Voas, Giraldo, Alzate, Hull**,**AN ACT RELATING TO CORPORATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS, AND PARTNERSHIPS -- WORKERS' COOPERATIVES (Clarifies the role of a workers' cooperative to allow it to operate as a hiring hall under certain circumstances.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7580.pdf>