**This Week At the State House**

Passing of Senator Frank Lombardo, III

The Senate has a very limited schedule this week as the entire General Assembly honors the passing of Senator Frank Lombardo, III of Johnston. As stated by the Senate leadership, “First elected to the Senate in 2010, Frank represented the Town of Johnston in the Rhode Island Senate with great distinction for more than a decade. He was a champion for his constituents, and especially for the small businesses that make up the backbone of our state’s economy. A small business owner himself, he believed deeply in the power of entrepreneurship and the need to open doors of opportunity to all Rhode Islanders. In 2019, he was named Chairman of the Senate Committee on Housing & Municipal Government, a role in which he provided outstanding leadership.” Senator Lombardo was a friend to the Chamber of Commerce and will be missed greatly.

Tuesday, February 27th

Once again, the House Corporations Committee will take testimony on self-service check-out lines; although this year’s bill is slightly different from the bill introduced last year. H.7230, An Act Relating to Commercial Law – Grocery Stores limits the number of customer self-checkout stations to six, requires grocery stores to maintain one manual check-out station for every self-checkout station in use, and gives the Attorney General’s office the authority to impose penalties for noncompliance. The penalty amount is not defined. The self-service check-out limitation provision in H.7230 could bring under its umbrella grocery stores, pharmacies, and certain retail stores that offer a wide array of goods. Written testimony can be forwarded to HouseCorporations@rilegislature.gov

**Next Week At the State House**

March 5th

The House Finance Committee has scheduled a number of hearings on the Governor’s proposed budget. On March 5th, the Committee will be hearing particular sections of Article 6 – Tax Article. Article 6 sections 3, 6 and 16-20 affects businesses engaging in the sale of e-cigarette and vaping products. The Governor proposes to change the licensing process to include these sales in the same license as regular tobacco products. Any products sold without a license would be subject to confiscation by the state starting October 1, 2024. The budget also includes a tax on these products equal to 80% of the wholesale cost (an exemption exists for research products).

Article 6 sections 14 and 15 propose to increase the cigarette tax by $.25 a pack for a total tax of $4.50 per pack. The language also calls for an age verification process to be adopted by online retailers of tobacco and electronic nicotine delivery systems.

Article 6 section 11 – Under current law, each year, the Tax Administrator is required to prepare and publish a list of the top 100 delinquent taxpayers in the state. The Governor’s budget expands the requirement so that the annual list will include all taxpayers to owe at least $50,000 in state taxes.

Article 6, section 21 eliminates the $50 filing fee for estates of decedents with a death on or after January 1, 2025

The following new bills have been filed:

Senate Bill No. [2496](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2496.pdf) DiPalma, Valverde, Burke, Miller, Felag, Bissaillon, Pearson, Lawson, Murray, Acosta**,**AN ACT RELATING TO THE CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (Authorizes the submission of proposals for several bonds to the people of the state at the general election to be held in November, 2024. These bonds relate to capital development and the "green economy.")

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2496.pdf>

House Bill No. [7700](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7700.pdf) Speakman, Donovan, Morales, Carson, Cotter, Spears, Cortvriend, Potter, Fenton-Fung**,**AN ACT RELATING TO FOOD AND DRUGS -- ADVERTISING OF RHODE ISLAND PRODUCTS -- LOCAL FOOD (Defines what local means as it pertains to certain food types being sold and advertised in Rhode Island.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7700.pdf>