**This Week At the State House**

Tuesday March 12th

House Committee on Health & Human Services

H.7694, An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – RI Individual Market Affordability Act of 2024 will be heard in room 135 at the Rise (approximately 4:30pm). H.7694 establishes a new program entitled “The Rhode Island Individual Market Affordability Program” and funds it through a 2% assessment on private insurance premiums starting in 2025. The funds can be used to reduce cost sharing for individuals (eligible for subsidies) enrolled in health insurance coverage through the RI Health Exchange; provide payments to carriers to increase affordability of insurance on the individual market for lower household income families; and pay for administrative costs related to the new program. A 2022 study by KFF revealed our state has the 6th highest average employer-paid health insurance premium costs in the United States. New York is highest in cost, followed by Washington DC, Alaska, Vermont, Connecticut and then Rhode Island. Massachusetts ranked 11th. <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/single-coverage/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Total%20Annual%20Premium%22,%22sort%22:%22desc%22%7D>

As premiums increase, it becomes more difficult for businesses to provide health insurance benefits to employees; it makes our state less competitive in attracting economic development to the state and pushes current employees into the individual marketplace. The Chamber, together with other business organizations, have been advocating for the creation of a health care mandated benefits review committee. The committee would be charged with evaluating, on a use and cost basis, all proposed new health care mandates and programs, and then providing that information to the General Assembly before the legislature votes to change the system. Other states have independent bodies, agencies, or designated entities to perform such studies. Certain states require proponents to submit a complete study (contents of the study are stated in statute) with the request to introduce legislation. So far in 2024, sixty-two bills have been introduced in the House and Senate to add new benefits to the health care system. It is an increasing trend that is detrimental to the state’s economy.

Wednesday, March 13th

Senate Labor Committee

Three bills of interest will be heard in the Senate Labor Committee at 4:00 in room 212.

S.2467, An Act Relating to Labor Relations – Rhode Island Parental and Family Medical Leave Act increases the number of benefit weeks provided to employees from thirteen weeks every two years, to twenty-four weeks every two years. While the Chamber understands that this is unpaid leave, the employer must still keep the employee’s job waiting for the person’s return. Employers are having an extremely difficult time attracting employees. Finding temporary workers can be even more challenging. Should S.2467 pass, employers will be looking for replacements for almost six months, at a time when they cannot find employees for a full year. This is a very high burden at a time when businesses are least able to adapt. Additionally, should the proponents of the expansion of the state’s Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) program be successful, the expansion of Family Leave, together with the expansion of TCI would leave employers trying to find replacement employees for up to nine months. The Chamber strongly encourages you to contact your legislators about this proposal as well as the proposal to expand the TCI program (S.2121 and H.7171). Testimony on S.2467 can be emailed to SLegislation@rilegislature.gov The bill can be reviewed in its entirety at <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2467.pdf>

S.2123, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Payment of Wages, changes an employer’s responsibilities as it relates to providing employees with statements of earnings. Today employers must include the hours worked, deductions from gross earnings and an explanation of those deductions. The legislation adds items such as the last four digits of the social security number, deduction explanations ***in the employee’s preferred language***, the employer’s address and name, and output information if pay is based on quantity. It also requires employers to keep these records for an undisclosed period of time. Today, employers must keep records for three years. S.2123 eliminates that provision in its entirety, suggesting the employer must keep the records until it winds up its business activity. S.2123 also requires employers to provide a type of “mini employee handbook” to employees ***in each employee’s primary language***. The information includes items such as: wage information, benefits, holiday information, sick time, and travel and expense policies. DataUSA reports that 22.4% of Rhode Island households report speaking a primary language other than English. While the most common non-English language spoken in Rhode Island is Spanish followed by Portuguese, there are reportedly forty-one languages spoken as a primary language in the State. Some families are fluent in both their primary language and English, others are not. This bill would require employers to be prepared to provide information in multiple languages, a very high burden for Rhode Island businesses. <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2123.pdf>

Businesses in the warehouse industry are encouraged to submit testimony on S.2478, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Warehouse Worker Protection Act. S.2478 requires employers in the warehousing industry to provide employees with a written description of quotas an employee is required to meet within a defined period and any penalties that could be levied as a result of failing to meet the quota. If the quota changes, employees must be notified within two business days of the change. Each time a penalty is levied, the employer must provide the employee with “an applicable quota.” It is unclear whether this last provision mentioned, refers to a written description of the failure to meet the quota established, or if an existing quota will have to be adjusted to meet the employee’s “under performance.” Section 28-60-4 of the bill states, “An employee shall not be required to meet a quota that prevents compliance with meal or rest periods or use of bathroom facilities, including reasonable travel time to and from bathroom facilities.” This language seems to imply that the employer must go to each station and attempt to determine how long a “reasonable person” would need to walk to the bathroom and back. As employees move around the warehouse, the employer would have to keep track of the constant location of the employee and re-calculate the time needed in order to avoid the penalties that are contained in S.2478 and to keep the necessary records outlined in S.2478. Under the bill, employers are required to keep records on the following items: (1) Each employee's own personal work speed data; (2) The aggregated work speed data for similar employees at the same establishment; and (3) The written descriptions of the quota such employee was provided. Lastly, S.2478 provides a private right of action by an employee for injunctive relief, costs and attorney’s fees. If the employer took any action that might be deemed to be retaliatory by the employee, the employer could be subject to penalties of $10,000 or three times the unpaid wages and benefits, whichever is greater.

<https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2478.pdf>

Thursday, March 14th

Senate Committee on Housing & Municipal Government

Owners of certain multi-family residential properties should take note of S.2631, An Act Relating to property-Community Opportunity to Purchase Act. S.2631 will be heard in committee Thursday, at the Rise in room 212. This legislation creates a right of first offer for non-profit organizations wishing to purchase certain privately-owned real property with five or more residential rental units (whether or not the property also includes non-residential uses). Rhode Island Housing would be responsible for determining which nonprofit organizations qualify for this special treatment, and for posting a list of those entities on a website. Private owners of multi-family residential properties that were constructed twenty (20) years ago or more, would be required to notify eligible non-profits of the desire to sell the property prior to notifying the general public. The normal sales process could not begin until the initial notification is complete. Those non-profits are given at least sixty (60) days to submit offers to purchase. Every seller must submit a signed declaration of compliance with this proposed law within fifteen (15) days of the sale of the building. It is signed under penalty of perjury. Should the seller fail to file the declaration, the seller is subject to a fine of up to $5,000. <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2631.pdf> Testimony should be emailed to SLegislation@rilegislature.gov

The following new bills have been filed:

Senate Bill No. [2711](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2711.pdf) Bissaillon**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW -- GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS -- DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES (Prohibits credit reporting, executions, attachments against a principal residence for judgments based on medical debt. Defines medical debt as an amount for the receipt of health care services, products, or devices.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2711.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [2738](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2738.pdf) Kallman, Gu, DiMario, Miller, Valverde, LaMountain, Acosta, McKenney, Burke**,**AN ACT RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- TERMINATION OF SERVICE TO PERSONS WHO ARE DISABLED, SERIOUSLY ILL, OR IN ARREARS OF PAYMENT (Extends the forbearance of utility terminations for customers with serious illness certifications and would amend various provisions related to the termination of utility services for persons who are disabled, seriously ill, or in arrears.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2738.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [2772](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2772.pdf) (Secretary of State) Quezada, Mack, Zurier, Lauria, Tikoian, Ujifusa**,**AN ACT RELATING TO CORPORATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS -- UNIFORM PARTNERSHIP ACT (Requires certain limited liability partnership providing professional services to carry liability insurance.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2772.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [2783](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2783.pdf) Bissaillon, Burke, Mack**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- EMPLOYMENT SECURITY -- BENEFITS (Allows unemployment benefits for workers who are on strike or are locked out of their workplaces by their employer due to a labor dispute.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2783.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [2785](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2785.pdf) LaMountain, Bissaillon**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- LABOR RELATIONS ACT -- EMPLOYEE FREE SPEECH RIGHTS (Protects employees free speech regarding political or religious matters.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2785.pdf>

House Bill No. [7927](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7927.pdf) Solomon**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- TAXATION OF BANKS (Provides banks with an election to use the allocation and apportionment method of income for purposes of taxation.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7927.pdf>

House Bill No. [7928](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7928.pdf) Casey, Finkelman, Solomon, Phillips, Fenton-Fung, J. Brien, Chippendale, Dawson, Costantino**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- BUSINESS CORPORATION TAX (Repeals the corporation minimum tax.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7928.pdf>

House Bill No. [7929](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7929.pdf) Casey, Finkelman, Solomon, Phillips, J. Brien, Chippendale, Dawson**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- PERSONAL INCOME TAX (Authorizes a retroactive tax credit for tax yr 2022/thereafter/allowing investment tax credits to be passed through to the personal income tax returns of eligible Sub-S corporation shareholders/limited liability company members who meet certain conditions)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7929.pdf>

House Bill No. [7940](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7940.pdf) Voas, Alzate, Potter, Kazarian, Hull, Marszalkowski, DeSimone, Finkelman, Caldwell, Slater**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW -- GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS -- SENIOR SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT (Prohibits the charging of any fees to a senior citizen who is 65 years of age or older for a hard-copy paper bill, invoice or statement. The violation of this provision would be a deceptive trade practice subject to a ($500) fine.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7940.pdf>

House Bill No. [7942](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7942.pdf) Craven**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW -- GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS -- DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES (Makes any term or condition in any agreement that unnecessarily burdens a person's vindication of rights under this section null and void.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7942.pdf>

House Bill No. [7981](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7981.pdf) Giraldo, Speakman, Biah, Henries, Voas, Kislak, Batista, Diaz, Alzate, Kazarian**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- ZONING ORDINANCES (Amends the provisions relative to permitted uses within residential, industrial and commercial zoning use districts.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7981.pdf>

House Bill No. [8044](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8044.pdf) Hull, J. Lombardi, Fogarty, Handy, Shallcross Smith, Ajello, Ackerman, Slater, Azzinaro, Bennett**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ACT (Protects bullying/psychological abuse in workplace inflicted upon employees by employers/co-employees/provides civil remedies to affected employees/fines against employers/imprisonment/fines against co-employees.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8044.pdf>