**Call to Action – Now is the Time! The Chamber Needs Your Help!**

The Chamber is asking you to contact your State Representative and State Senator and let them know how H.7171 and S.2121 will affect your business.

H.7171, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Temporary Disability Insurance, (S.2121 is the identical bill) increases the weekly dependance allowance provided under TDI/TCI 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. It is imperative that you contact your legislators by phone, or email. Both bills are being pushed heavily by the advocates and are under consideration. <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7171.pdf>

**Legislative Break Week Begins April 15th**

The General Assembly will be on legislative break April 15th – April 19th and will return to hearing calendars and floor session April 23rd. This will begin the third phase of the legislative process as bills begin to pass at an accelerated rate. The May Revenue Estimating Conference starts April 26th and will wrap up May 10th, providing the data needed to begin the final negotiations for the FY2025 budget.

**This Week At the State House**

Wednesday, April 10th

The House Labor Committee’s 4:00 meeting schedule includes H.7793, An Act Relating to Labor Relations – Rhode Island Parental and Family Medical Leave Act which increases the number of benefit weeks provided to employees from thirteen weeks every two years, to twenty-four weeks every two years (S.2467 is the Senate companion bill). 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 H.7793 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 (H.7171 and S.2121). The Senate has already passed both S.2467 and S.2121. Both Senate bills are in the House Labor Committee. H.7793 can be viewed at: <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7793.pdf> Testimony can be emailed to HouseLabor@rilegislature.gov by 1:00 Wednesday.

At 4:30, the Senate Labor Committee will take testimony on S.2477, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Payment of Wages – Frequency of Payment. This bill requires all employers to pay employees on a weekly basis unless an employee’s wages are fixed at a biweekly, semi-monthly, monthly or annual rate. S.2477 provides an exemption for state and municipalities as well as any nonprofit organization with less than 25 employees. In 2013, the business community fought hard to pass biweekly pay for all employees. The compromise reached allowed the Department of Labor and Training to authorize biweekly pay for businesses with an average payroll equal to 200% of the state’s minimum wage, a surety bond equal to the highest two weeks payroll exposure, and no history of labor violations. S.2477 removes the 2013 compromise language. Today, Rhode Island has one of the strictest “frequency of payment” laws in the country. (CA requires weekly pay for agricultural workers; NY requires weekly pay for manual workers although large employers may apply for an exemption; VT requires weekly pay although permits biweekly pay if employers provide written notice of the policy change). If this is of interest to your business, testimony can be submitted to: SLegislation@rilegislature.gov To read the actual language of the bill go to: <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2477.pdf>

The Washington Bridge continues to be a major focus at the State House. The Senate Committee on Rules, Government Ethics and Oversight has scheduled S.2727, An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Department of Transportation for hearing and a possible vote. S.2727 requires the Department of Transportation to submit a monthly progress report to the General Assembly. The report must include (1) An updated timeline regarding actions to be undertaken on the Washington Bridge, including, repairs, alterations, or replacement of all or a portion of the structures. (2) A list of consulting firms retained or utilized by the department. (3) Data on traffic patterns over the bridge for the time period covered by the report. (4) Data on traffic delays. (5) An overview of costs related to actions on the bridge, and (6) Any updates pertaining to pending investigations and audits related to the bridge. The hearing 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/)

The following new bills have been filed:

House Bill No. [8127](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8127.pdf) Alzate, Batista, Carson, Spears, Cotter, McGaw, Donovan, DeSimone, Speakman, Morales**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ACT (Establishes requirements which would have to be met by an applicant prior to the issuing of permits for an activity that would have an environmental impact on or would increase the cumulative impacts on an environmental justice area.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8127.pdf>

House Bill No. [8143](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8143.pdf) Kislak, Cotter, Fogarty, Potter, Cruz, Boylan, McGaw**,**AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- PHARMACIES (Restricts audits of pharmacists conducted by insurers and their intermediaries, limiting audits to 1 per year unless fraud or misrepresentation is reasonably suspected. The Rhode Island attorney would have the authority to impose sanctions for violations.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8143.pdf>

House Bill No. [8148](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8148.pdf) (Attorney General) Cortvriend, Tanzi, Knight, Finkelman, Handy, Edwards, Fogarty, Azzinaro, McNamara, Speakman**,**AN ACT RELATING TO WATERS AND NAVIGATION -- COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL (Replaces the coastal resources management council with a state department of coastal resources and transfers all of the powers and duties between the two (2) authorities.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H8148.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [2946](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2946.pdf) Cano, Mack**,**AN ACT RELATING TO INSURANCE -- ACCIDENT AND SICKNESS INSURANCE POLICIES (Mandates all insurance plans provide insurance coverage for diagnosing and treating infertility for women between the ages of 25 and 42 years including preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) in conjunction with in vitro fertilization (IVF).)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/SenateText24/S2946.pdf>