**This Week At the State House**

This week brings a number of Labor bills, a few general business items, and the opportunity to weigh in on the housing package that is sponsored by the House Speaker and members of his team. There are no Monday hearings posted this week.

**Tuesday, March 14th**

The House Corporations Committee is meeting at the Rise (approximately 4:30pm) in Room 101. H.5732, An Act Relating to Commercial Law – Gift Card Fraud, requires all entities that sell gift cards to display a notice at the location where cards are sold. The notice must caution the purchaser about prepaid card scams and instruct the purchaser on what to do if they suspect they might be a potential victim of such a scam. Employers must train employees on how to identify and respond to gift card fraud – the Attorney General is directed to distribute materials to assist with training. Failure to comply with this law carries a penalty of $500 which shall be overseen by the Superior Court. Testimony can be submitted to HouseCorporations@rilegislature.gov

State purchasing preferences for companies with child care programs is a topic for the House Committee on State Government and Elections, Tuesday at the Rise in the House Lounge. H.5964, An Act Relating to Public Property and Works – Day Care Programs State Purchases, tries to promote child care related benefits by giving a state bidder preferential treatment. Preference shall be provided to (1) bidders which possess a stated child care policy when two or more bidders submit equal bids, (2) for bids on contracts of less than $25,000, and (3) for bids for occasional and temporary personal services. The state is authorized to consider the type of child care program provided, such as, amount of subsidy, parenting seminars, family counseling, flexible hours, family leave options, flexible spending accounts, etc. Testimony may be submitted to HouseStateGovernmentandElections@rilegislature.gov

The Senate Commerce Committee will take testimony on S.472, An Act Relating to Commercial Law – Grocery Stores. This bill limits the number of customer self-checkout stations to six (two less than the House legislative version); and requires stores to maintain one manual check-out station for every self-checkout station in use. Unlike the House version, S.472 does not include a payment requirement to customers that utilize the self-check-out station. S.472 could bring under its umbrella grocery stores, pharmacies, and certain retail stores that offer a wide array of goods. Testimony may be submitted to slegislation@rilegislature.gov

**Wednesday, March 15th**

This is a big day for the House Labor Committee, meeting at 5:00pm in Room 101. H.5477, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Temporary Disability Insurance, allows self employed individuals to opt in to the TDI/TCI program. Self-employed individual choosing to opt in, become eligible to collect benefits after contributing to the program for twelve months. H.5477 also increases the taxable wage base to equal the Social Security contribution wage base starting calendar year 2024. In 2023, that wage base is $160,200. The current taxable wage base for TDI/TCI is $84,000.

H.5711, An Act Relating to Corporations – Workers’ Cooperatives, provides exclusive benefits to cooperatives. Established in 2017, the General Assembly passed a law allowing the creation of an entity where individuals could complete a probationary period as a part-time or full-time employee and become a voting member of the company. The entity is taxed as a corporation. The law also states, “To the extent that a workers’ cooperative has shareholders (owners) who are employees (members), the workers’ cooperative shall be subject to the provisions of title 28 related to employees including, but not limited to: department of labor and training payroll taxes, temporary disability insurance, state unemployment insurance and workers’ compensation insurance.” H.5711 adds a new operational model for cooperatives. It allows co-ops to adopt, in its bylaws, the ability to furnish skilled labor from its members to other entities and to treat those members as independent contractors for that purpose – not as an employee of the co-op. If this bill is of interest to you, please submit testimony at HouseLabor@rilegislature.gov or attend in person.

H.5927, 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.

H.5929, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Fair Employment Practices, This bill states that it is an unlawful employment practice to require an employee as a condition of employment, to execute a nondisclosure agreement or an agreement with a clause that requires alleged violations of civil rights remain confidential, or a non-disparagement agreement concerning alleged violations of civil rights. Any contract provision in violation of this subsection shall be void as a violation of public policy. In previous years, those supporting this legislation stated that this bill did not chill the use of settlement agreements, and further that it was not the intent to discourage settlement agreements. The Chamber doesn’t have that same comfort level. Unless the unfair employment practice alleged is so one-sided and concrete as to hit the media, a settlement agreement is going to include a confidentiality agreement. Without it, the business is better off fighting it to the end – it will be in the public realm anyway. If the employee wants to retain his or her right to talk about the situation or talk about the employer in a negative way, then that employee can decline the settlement agreement and continue with the lawsuit. Both parties have a choice under the current law.

If you wish to submit testimony on any of these bills, email it to HouseLabor@rilegislature.gov

**Thursday, March 16th**

The Housing package is the big topic of the day in the House Committee on Municipal Government & Housing at the Rise in Room 101. The following is a description of the bills *as provided by the House* along with a link to the actual language. If you wish to testify on any of these bills in person, we encourage you to arrive at the State House around 4:00 pm in order to sign in early. Written testimony can also be submitted to HouseMunicipalGovernmentandHousing@rilegislature.gov

* [2023-H 6081](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6081.pdf), sponsored by Speaker Shekarchi, this bill would amend Rhode Island’s Low and Moderate Income Housing Act. It would streamline the process of permitting from three steps to two steps, not including pre-application, to follow the purpose of the comprehensive permit process, and sets forth necessary submission items at each stage of the permitting process. The legislation retains current standards, but provides greater clarity for review of approvals and denials to make clearer standards for the review of applications.
* [2023-H 6082](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6082.pdf), sponsored by Rep. Speakman would amend last year’s legislation ([2022-H 7942 SUB B](http://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText22/HouseText22/H7942B.pdf)) pertaining to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to spur production of ADUs, including as a home for populations unable to find suitable affordable housing, such as seniors and college/professional school graduates. The legislation makes clear what ADUs are allowed by right and how they are considered in the local permitting process. It does not take away municipal control of permitting, but only allows two categories by right. The legislation also specifies that ADUs cannot be used for short-term/transient use. The legislation would be effective immediately.
* [2023-H 6085](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6085.pdf), sponsored by Municipal Government and Housing Committee Chairman Stephen M. Casey (D-Dist. 50, Woonsocket) would require all municipal land use approvals to be consistent with future land use maps so long as the municipality’s comprehensive plan is updated in accordance with statute. The legislation specifies that comprehensive plans must be updated at least every 10 years and that comprehensive plans not updated within 12 years will not be able to be utilized as the basis for local board denials. It also provides accountability and specifies that the city/town must review goals/progress with comprehensive plans annually.
* [2023-H 6084](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6084.pdf), sponsored by Rep. Leonela Felix (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket) creates a transit-oriented development pilot program to encourage growth centers along transit corridors identified by state transit plans. The application, award, and reporting process for the pilot program would be outlined via rules and regulations developed by the Secretary of Housing.
* [2023-H 6090](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6090.pdf), sponsored by Special Legislation Committee Chairwoman Karen Alzate (D-Dist. 60, Pawtucket, Central Falls) would allow, as a permitted use, the adaptive reuse of commercial structures (such as factories, hospitals, offices, malls, religious facilities, and schools) into high density residential developments. The legislation sets forth zoning incentives for development, including parking not required to be over one space per unit and minimum lot size per dwelling unit not to determine density. This bill does not take away the municipal review and permitting process for such developments.
* [2023-H 6087](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6087.pdf), sponsored by Rep. Cherie L. Cruz (D-Dist. 58, Pawtucket) would eliminate the rental application fee. The legislation would be effective January 1, 2024.
* [2023-H 6086](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6086.pdf), sponsored by Labor Committee Chairman Arthur J. Corvese (D-Dist. 55) would standardize the type of notice and advertisements required for all land use permitting. This legislation does not alter the persons or properties receiving notification as abutters, and does not change the ability for anyone to request notice under the registry provision passed several years ago.
* [2023-H 6088](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6088.pdf), sponsored by Rep. Speakman would extend the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act ([2022-H 7091](http://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText22/HouseText22/H7091.pdf)) from 2023 to 2025. The legislation would also extend the purpose of the commission to include “housing affordability.”
* [2023-H 6089](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6089.pdf), sponsored by Rep. Joshua J. Giraldo (D-Dist. 56, Central Falls) would extend the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Entire Area of Land Use, Preservation, Development, Housing, Environment, and Regulation ([2022-H 7576](http://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText22/HouseText22/H7576.pdf)) from 2023 to 2025

**Friday, March 17th**

Happy St. Patrick’s Day!!!

The following new bills have been filed:

House Bill No. [6142](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6142.pdf) Alzate, Diaz, Stewart, Cruz, Morales, Shanley, Speakman, Henries**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- DOMESTIC WORKERS' BILL OF RIGHTS (Establishes a bill of rights for domestic workers and provides for a minimum set of benefits relating to working conditions, hours worked and time off from work.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6142.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [467](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0467.pdf) Zurier, Lauria**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- ZERO-EMISSION LAWN CARE DEVICES (Mandates that by January 1, 2025, all lawn care devices sold in the state have zero emissions and that by January 1, 2028, all lawn care devices used in the state have zero emissions. DEM to promulgate rules and regulations.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0467.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [472](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0472.pdf) Lawson, McKenney, Euer, Lauria, DiMario, Cano, Britto, Mack**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW--GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS -- GROCERY STORES (Creates a new chapter related to grocery stores, specifically limiting the number of self-service checkout units.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0472.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [473](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0473.pdf) Gu, Gallo, Mack, Lawson, McKenney, Valverde, Lauria**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- PAYMENT OF WAGES (Requires employers in Rhode Island with thirty (30) or more employees would be required to list competitive salary ranges on their job postings on the company's hiring page or third-party websites like Glassdoor, LinkedIn, Indeed or other job boards.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0473.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [534](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0534.pdf) Miller, DiPalma, Euer, DiMario, Lawson, Valverde, Murray, Kallman**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- TEMPORARY DISABILITY INSURANCE -- GENERAL PROVISIONS (Increases the taxable wage base upon which employees make contributions to the TDI and TCI funds, increases individual benefit rates for lower wage individuals, and creates an opt- in option for self-employed workers.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0534.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [536](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0536.pdf) Picard**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- STATE TAX OFFICIALS (Limits the assessment of interest to four (4) calendar years prior to the date on which notice of the delinquent payment is sent to the taxpayer.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0536.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [545](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0545.pdf) Kallman, DiPalma, Lawson, DiMario, Zurier, Tikoian, Murray, Felag, Ruggerio, Valverde**,**AN ACT RELATING TO PUBLIC FINANCE -- RHODE ISLAND SECURE CHOICE RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROGRAM ACT (Establishes the Rhode Island secure choice retirement savings program as a public corporation managing IRA-type investments. Requires employers to offer the program to employees or be subject to a $250 penalty per employee.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0545.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [550](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0550.pdf) LaMountain, Britto, F. Lombardi, Burke, Lauria**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- THE RHODE ISLAND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FUND (Expands the definition of a minority business and allows corporation to allocate more than 20k to a small business development fund.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0550.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [553](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0553.pdf) Ciccone, F. Lombardi, DiPalma**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION – PERSONAL INCOME TAX (Adds one new income tax bracket for purposes of Rhode Island state income taxation.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0553.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [595](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0595.pdf) Gu, Euer, Kallman, Mack, Valverde, Lauria**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES – RHODE ISLAND DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FEE ACT (Allows impact fees to be imposed on commercial properties to subsidize the creation of affordable housing projects within the municipality, at the discretion of the appropriate governmental agency.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0595.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [631](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0631.pdf) Murray**,**AN ACT RELATING TO FOOD AND DRUGS -- SOCIAL HOST REGULATIONS (Creates a social host statutory framework to address the presence and consumption of controlled substances, including marijuana as it relates to minors, at social parties, gatherings and events.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0631.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [663](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0663.pdf) Acosta, Kallman, Mack, Euer, Murray, LaMountain**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- PAYMENT OF WAGES (Requires employer to furnish items and conditions of employment and a pay stub explaining how wages were calculated/reasons for deductions/allows the employee to file a court action against employer for violation.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0663.pdf>

Senate Bill No. [664](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0664.pdf) de la Cruz, Rogers, Raptakis, Lombardo, E Morgan**,**AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- FREEDOM TO TRAVEL AND WORK ACT (Establishes an occupational regulatory framework by authorizing the issuance of occupational licenses and government certifications by recognition for qualified worker applicants from other states.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/SenateText23/S0664.pdf>