**An Update from the State House**

**What’s Going On This Week**

**Senate Labor Committee Schedules Equal Pay Bill and Reporting Bill for VOTE**

After taking testimony on **S**.**2475** last week, the ***Senate Labor Committee has scheduled an April 4th VOTE on S.2475*** (Senators Goldin, Goodwin, Ruggerio, Lynch Prata, and McCaffrey) which requires employers to pay employees at the same wage rate if they work in “comparable” jobs. If an employer is deemed to be in violation of this act, the employer can not cure the situation by lowering the wages of other employees. Any employee that successfully challenges his/her wages is entitled to unpaid back wages, benefits, other compensatory damages and liquidated damages equal to *three times* the unpaid wages and benefits owed. **The Chamber opposed S.2475** siting the lack of a workable definition for “comparable” work and the tremendous opportunity for costly litigation. It’s unclear whether the bill may be amended in any way. The bill can be found at <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText18/SenateText18/S2475.pdf>

***Please contact your senator and express your concerns about the wording of this bill.***

The second bill that is scheduled for a **vote on April 4th is** **S.2638** (Senators Goodwin and Goldin). Like S.2475, this bill was heard in the committee last week. S.2638 requires businesses with 100 or more employees to file an annual report with the Department of Labor. The report must contain information regarding the compensation and hours worked by employees broken down by gender, race, ethnicity, and job category. Should an employer fail to submit the report, the Department can file and action in court to compel the company to comply. **The Chamber opposes S.2638**. ***If your company has 100 or more employees, contact your senator today!***

Tuesday, April 3rd, the Senate Health and Human Resources Committee will take testimony on **S.2237** (Senators Calkin, Seveney, Euer, Goldin, and Miller). This bill eliminates the current health care system in Rhode Island and replaces it with a universal plan called the “Rhode Island Comprehensive Health Insurance Program” (RICHIP). The program would cover: primary and preventative care; dietary and nutritional therapies; inpatient care; outpatient care; emergency and urgently needed care; prescription drugs and medical devices; laboratory and diagnostic services; palliative care; mental health services; oral health, including dental services, periodontics, oral surgery, and endodontics; substance abuse treatment services; physical therapy and chiropractic services; vision care and vision correction; and hearing services, including coverage of hearing aids. The program would be funded through a 10% payroll tax (80% paid by the employers and 20% paid by employees), a tax on income, with higher income brackets paying higher contributions, a 10% tax on unearned income, and a 10% payroll tax on self-employed individuals – of which that person pays 100% of the tax.

The following bills were filed last week:

House Bill No. [8004](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText18/HouseText18/H8004.pdf)

**BY**  McKiernan, O'Brien, Craven, McEntee, Williams

**ENTITLED,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS - EMPLOYMENT SECURITY - BENEFITS (Increases the maximum weekly unemployment benefit rate to the higher of fifty-seven and one-half percent (57.5%) of the average weekly wages paid to workers in the prior calendar year or six hundred sixteen dollars ($616) per week.)

House Bill No. [8014](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText18/HouseText18/H8014.pdf)

**BY**  Blazejewski, Bennett, Regunberg, Fogarty, Tanzi

**ENTITLED,**AN ACT RELATING TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND HOSPITALS -- MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMER ADVOCATES OF RHODE ISLAND -- OASIS WELLNESS AND RECOVERY CENTER (Establishes a mental health consumer advocate and wellness recovery center to provide support for those suffering from mental health issues and would appropriate two-hundred ninety five thousand dollars ($295,000) to operate the program.)

House Bill No. [8015](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText18/HouseText18/H8015.pdf)

**BY**  McKiernan, Williams, Lombardi, Hull, Lima

**ENTITLED,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- PROPERTY SUBJECT TO TAXATION (Places limitations on the tax exempt real and personal property a nonprofit college, university or hospital may hold.)

House Bill No. [8016](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText18/HouseText18/H8016.pdf)

**BY**  Tobon, Barros, Maldonado, Diaz, Edwards

**ENTITLED,**AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- STATE AID (Appropriates $4,000,000 to the city of Pawtucket to clean and cap the city's municipal transfer station, and further appropriates another $1,000,000 to the city to market the property for a renewable energy facility or facilities.)

House Bill No. [8022](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText18/HouseText18/H8022.pdf)

**BY**  Edwards, Keable, Johnston, Casey

**ENTITLED,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- UNLAWFUL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES (Prohibits an employer, employment agency, labor organization, or employee, to commit any act declared to be an unlawful employment practice; individuals would be held personally liable for such conduct.)

Senate Bill No. [2747](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText18/SenateText18/S2747.pdf)

**BY**  Euer, Coyne, Miller, Sosnowski, Calkin

**ENTITLED,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- RHODE ISLAND GLOBAL WARMING SOLUTIONS ACT (Establishes the Rhode Island global warming solutions act to reduce carbon emissions across various sectors of the local economy.)