**Last Week At the State House**

**Bill Limits Employers’ Rights**

The House Labor Committee room was packed last week for the hearing on H.7106, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Labor Relations Act. Members of the labor unions lined up to support the bill that purposes to protect the free speech rights of employees in the workplace, by barring employers from holding mandatory meetings with employees to discuss any issue covered under the bill’s definition of “political matters.” “Political matters” is very broadly defined as, “matters relating to elections for political office, political parties, proposals to change legislation, proposals to change regulation and the decision to join or support any political party or political, civic, community, fraternal or labor organization.”

The Chamber pushed back stating H.7106 would prohibit employers from requiring non-managerial employees to attend a meeting to learn about legislative proposals or regulatory matters as well as meetings to provide information concerning labor organization efforts. If enacted this legislation would severely limit an employer’s ability to educate employees about legislation, including legislation that would materially impact the business’ operations or the employee’s day-to-day job responsibilities. H.7106 is similar to a law passed in Connecticut that is now being challenged in the U.S. District Court.

The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 is a federal law that specifically allows employers to hold such meetings provided they do not threaten employees in the meeting:

***“c) Expression of views without threat of reprisal or force or promise of benefit.*** *The expressing of any views, argument, or opinion, or the dissemination thereof, whether in written, printed, graphic, or visual form, shall not constitute or be evidence of an unfair labor practice under any of the provisions of this subchapter, if such expression contains no threat of reprisal or force or promise of benefit.”*

**If you have an interest in this bill, now is the time to contact your legislator**. An amendment is under discussion, however that amendment has not yet been shared with the Chamber and is likely to retain, at the very least, the labor organization meeting ban language. The bill can be viewed at: <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7106.pdf>

**This Week At the State House**

Tuesday, February 6th

The House Finance Committee begins its months long process of reviewing the Governor’s proposed budget on Tuesday at the Rise (approximately 4:30) with a budget briefing provided by the House Fiscal Staff Director Sharon Reynolds. This annual event is usually very informative and sets the stage for future hearings on the various Articles. The meeting 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 House Corporations Committee is taking testimony on proposed changes to the Uniform Commercial Code. H.7210, An Act Relating to the Uniform Commercial Code, suggests a number of technical changes affecting (1) the “perfection by control” rule, (2) actions for buyers of chattel paper and electronic documents, (3) priority of purchasers of paper, and (4) notification of disposition of collateral rules. If your business participates in these consumer activities, please review the legislation at: <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7210.pdf>

Thursday, February 8th

For businesses located in Cumberland, the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing is scheduled to vote on H.7244, An Act Relating to Towns and Cities. The bill would authorize the town of Cumberland to require the registration of wholesale, retail, commercial, professional service or manufacturing businesses situated in Cumberland. This act would take effect upon passage.

**What’s in the Governor’s Budget?**

**Article 3 – Relating to Government Reform and Reorganization**

Article 3 is a 70-page Article that addresses agency reporting requirements, paint and mattress programs, unemployment insurance rating, residential landlords, residential housing stock and mortgage rate study, a study relating to healthcare workers, and state purchasing. Specifically, the Article proposes the following:

* Changes, for the year 2024 only, the date the Department of Labor determines the unemployment insurance tax rate from September 30th, to “any date between September 30 and December 31, at the discretion of the Director.” In another section of the budget, the Governor asks for the authority to move unspent ARPA monies to other areas – including the unemployment trust fund. If a transfer is made, changing the tax rate setting day could be beneficial to the business community.
* Creates the RI Healthcare Workforce Data Collection Act to allow the Department of Health to collect data related to licensed healthcare professionals in an effort to better understand the provider challenges facing the state. The information would not be public except in an aggregate format.
* Amends the Landlord Tenant Act to require any landlord owning a property built before 1978 to register on a state-wide database and allows the Department of Health to create a publicly available database providing information on all landlords and units that have failed to provide a certificate of conformance with the State’s lead law.
* Amends the contents of a housing report required to be completed by the Executive Office of Commerce. Reports due starting April 15, 2026, must include a projection of the number of units required to meet estimated population growth, the percent of moderate-income units available, disparities in mortgage loan financing by race and ethnicity based on Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data, annual median gross rent growth and the annual growth in median owner-occupied home values by municipality.
* Proposes new ethical standards for all individuals involved in the procurement process and establishes a disciplinary process which enables the Chief Purchasing Officer to recommend the appropriate consequence and/or referral to the RI Ethics Commission. Establishes “public interest” as a primary goal of the public procurement system and establishes the E procurement system as the mainframe for all state contracts and solicitation. The article amends language and bidding practices to align with E procurement practices (summary taken from the Senate Fiscal Staff analysis).
* Changes the current paint stewardship program from one implemented by producers to one run by a successful bidder following an RFP process. If no entity bids or if the successful bid is deemed to be too high, the responsibility would fall to the RI Resource

Recovery Corporation to run the program until another RFP is completed.

* Changes the current mattress recycling program to rely on the RI Resource Recovery Corporation to solicit, through an RFP, an entity to run the recycling program for five years. If RI Resource Recovery determines it can operate the program in a more cost-effective manner, it has the authority to do so.
* Eliminates certain annual and periodic reports from various Departments

The following new bills have been filed:

House Bill No. [7351](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7351.pdf) Place, Rea**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- RHODE ISLAND ECONOMIC GROWTH BLOCKCHAIN ACT (Establishes an economic growth blockchain act, which would regulate virtual and digital assets, and establish depository banks for these purposes.) <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7351.pdf>

House Resolution No. [7353](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7353.pdf) McGaw, J. Lombardi, Boylan, Fogarty, Cortvriend, Spears, Carson, Kislak, Donovan, Handy**,**HOUSE RESOLUTION RESPECTFULLY REQUESTING RHODE ISLAND ENERGY IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL FOR NEW, MULTI-YEAR ELECTRIC VEHICLE PROGRAMMING <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7353.pdf>

House Resolution No. [7396](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7396.pdf) Messier, Knight, Kislak, Morales, Handy, Serpa, Fellela, Donovan, Speakman, Spears**,**JOINT RESOLUTION TO APPROVE, PUBLISH AND SUBMIT TO THE ELECTORS A PROPOSITION OF AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION -- RIGHT TO AN ADEQUATE EDUCATION (Amends the constitution to guarantee Rhode Island residents with equal opportunity to receive an education that is adequate, equitable and meaningful and provides judicial enforcement of this provision.) <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7396.pdf>

House Bill No. [7405](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7405.pdf) Place, Morales, Sanchez, Cruz**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION - AGREEMENT TO PHASE OUT CORPORATE INCENTIVES COMPACT ACT (Establishes a compact agreement among at least two (2) states to prohibit the use of subsidies to selectively retain industry or company entice relocation from one state to another state or to open a new facility.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7405.pdf>

House Bill No. [7406](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7406.pdf) P. Morgan**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- SUPPLY CHAIN RELOCATION INCENTIVES (Provides tax credits to an entity that relocates any part of the United States supply chain to Rhode Island. This act also provides tax credits and incentives to an entity that re-shores manufacturing production lines to Rhode Island.) <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7406.pdf>

House Bill No. [7424](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7424.pdf) (Secretary of State) Shanley, Edwards, Bennett, Casimiro, McNamara, Baginski, Craven, O'Brien**,**AN ACT RELATING TO COMMERCIAL LAW -- GENERAL REGULATORY PROVISIONS -- FILING OF ASSUMED NAME (Changes the term "assumed name" to "trade name" and centralizes the filing, administration and regulation process of trade names to the secretary of state and requires an annual renewal of the trade name.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7424.pdf>

House Bill No. [7425](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7425.pdf) (Secretary of State) Solomon, Casimiro**,**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/HouseText24/H7425.pdf>

House Bill No. [7457](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7457.pdf) Sanchez, Morales, Hull, Stewart, Henries, Handy, Speakman, Serpa, Ajello, Batista**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- PAYMENT OF WAGES -- FREQUENCY OF PAYMENT (Eliminate all exceptions to the provision that all employees are to be paid weekly except for employees of the state and its political subdivisions, municipal governments, and non-profit organizations with less than twenty-five (25) employees.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7457.pdf>

House Bill No. [7458](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7458.pdf) Tanzi, Boylan, Spears, Felix, Morales, Ajello, Potter, Cruz, Henries, Cotter**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES (Fair employment practices to include individuals appointed, contract for hire of apprenticeships.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7458.pdf>

House Bill No. [7486](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7486.pdf) Ajello, Kislak, Speakman, Potter, Handy, J. Lombardi, Alzate, Tanzi, Spears**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- PERSONAL INCOME TAX -- CAPITAL GAINS (Amends the capital gains tax rates and holding period from 5 years to 1 year. Imposes a non-owner occupied tax on homes assessed at more than $1,000,000.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7486.pdf>

House Bill No. [7489](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7489.pdf) Solomon, Voas, Finkelman, Baginski, Casey, O'Brien, Lima, Costantino, J. Brien, Kennedy**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- BUSINESS CORPORATION TAX (Reduces the corporate minimum tax to three hundred fifty dollars ($350).)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7489.pdf>

House Bill No. [7495](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7495.pdf) Boylan, Kislak, Ajello, Bennett, Spears, Carson, McGaw, Tanzi, Cruz, Knight**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- 2025 BATTERY-POWERED LEAF BLOWER PILOT REBATE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM (Establishes a new chapter for the 2024 Battery Powered Leaf Blower Pilot Rebate and Education Program.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText24/HouseText24/H7495.pdf>