**Bill Filing Continues**

Last week, General Assembly members introduced 315 new bills, bringing the total number of bills thus far to 1,573. We continue to hear that a record number of bills will be filed this year; and we are anticipating hundreds more to be introduced in the upcoming week. Keep watching Advocacy in Action for the latest updates.

**Monday, March 6th**

Unfortunately, with so many bills in the hopper, the Monday hearings appear to be returning. If you have an interest in any bills, but are unable to submit testimony by the Monday deadline, please submit your testimony to the appropriate committee as soon as you can, and reach out to your local legislators. Your voice is important and a deadline missed does not mean your voice cannot be heard.

The House Judiciary Committee is meeting Monday at 2:00 p.m. in Room 35. The hearing includes abortion bills on the docket so it has the potential to be a long hearing. There are also a couple bills of interest to the business community.

H.5439, An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – Procedure Generally – Causes of Action, allows for punitive damages for willful or wanton conduct and for reckless disregard for health and safety. The bill goes on to define “willful or wanton conduct” as “*conduct committed which the actor knew or should have known was dangerous or was done heedlessly and recklessly and without regard to consequences or the rights and safety of others*.” This change is dramatic and will likely lead to more litigation. Black’s Law Dictionary defines “heedlessness as, “The quality of being thoughtless and inconsiderate; conduct whereby the actor disregards the rights and safety of others.” Since 2002, the United States Chamber of Commerce Institute for Legal Reform has completed studies on the liability systems of all fifty states. In the 2019 survey, Rhode Island ranked 24th for overall ranking of State Liability Systems. The most favorable rankings Rhode Island received in this study were 12th in overall treatment of tort and contract litigation and 12th in trial judge impartiality. Rhode Island ranked 17th in damages. In all other categories, Rhode Island ranked much higher. To expand the ability to sue for punitive damages - meant to punish a party not make a victim whole - will make it more difficult for organizations like the Chamber to do its job effectively. If passed, we believe Rhode Island will drop further down the US Chamber Institute for Legal Reform rankings, as it will affect the two best rankings our state received in the 2019 study.

H.5440, An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – Procedure Generally – Decisions, Special Findings and Assessment of Damages, is also on the hearing schedule. H.5440 changes Rhode Island law by explicitly declaring that an injured person who is deemed to have assumed the risk by voluntarily participating in an activity known to potentially cause harm is not barred from recovery. Businesses involved in activities that include a degree of risk (sports, recreational activities) should pay particular attention to this bill, as should businesses with property accessible to the public or entities involved in spectator sports.

**Tuesday, March 7th**

The House Municipal Government and Housing Committee is meeting at the Rise (approximately 4:30 p.m.) in Room 101. H.5600 An Act Relating to Public Property and Works – All Electric Building Act, will be heard by the committee members. H.5600 bans municipalities from issuing a permit for the construction of any new mixed-fuel or fossil fueled commercial, residential or mixed-use buildings if the initial application is submitted after December 31, 2024. A blanket exemption exists for hospitals, medical facilities, biological research laboratories and restaurants. The bill does allow a municipality to modify a permit to allow some fossil fuel infrastructure if there is evidence to show the building cannot “feasibly” operate with all electric appliances, or if the building code requirements can’t be met without gas or oil. Under these circumstances the building would be permitted to install infrastructure for fossil fuel uses, alongside electricity infrastructure so that appliances and other systems are ready to switch when the products become available in the future. H.5600 specifically states that “*Financial considerations shall not be a sufficient basis to determine physical or technical infeasibility*.”

H.5600 bans local permitting or construction permits that would convert all-electric buildings of any type to mixed-fuel buildings where the initial application was submitted after December 31, 2024.

Lastly, H.5600 requires the Public Utilities Commission, together with the Office of Housing Community Development and the State Building Code Commission, to file a report by February 1, 2025, outlining necessary policies that should be put in place to ensure the all-electric building act does not affect the affordability of electricity – defined as more than 6% of a residential customer’s income.

According to the Energy Information Agency, in December, 2022, the average price of electricity for a commercial user in Rhode Island was the 7th highest in the country, behind Hawaii, New Hampshire, California, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Alaska. For industrial users, Rhode Island had the 2nd highest rate in the country – second only to Hawaii. H.5600 seems to suggest that should a switch to all electric energy result in a higher price for the commodity, the PUC would be encouraged to lower the rate for residential users and place the financial burden on to the business community.

Rhode Island has greenhouse emission reduction requirements it must meet due to the passage of the 2021 Act on Climate. The Chamber will be urging the committee not to pass H.5600 at this time but to allow the state agencies to perform all of their due diligence concerning options available to meet the new state law, along with cost data and energy supply data so that all of the Rhode Island public will understand where we are going, why, and what to expect as we transform into a green energy economy.

**Thursday, March 9th**

The House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources is meeting at the Rise (4:30 p.m) in Room 101.

H.5549, An Act Relating to Health and Safety – Zero Emission Lawn Care Devices, requires all lawn care devices – personal or commercial – used in Rhode Island to be zero emission devices by January 1, 2028. Only zero emission lawn care devices could be sold in Rhode Island as of January 1, 2025. The bill calls for a trade-in program for gas powered devices as available funds permit. Anyone using a banned device after January 1, 2028 is subject to a fine of $50 for the first offense, $100 for the second offense and $500 for each offense thereafter.

H.5425, An Act Relating to Public Property and Works – The Green Buildings Act, requires the Office of Energy Resources to establish building energy performance standards for large commercial and residential buildings. “Large building” includes residential and commercial buildings with 25,000 sq. ft or more starting January 1, 2023. Beginning January 1, 2026, the definition includes buildings with more than 20,000 sq. ft. and it brings in buildings with over 15,000 sq. ft. starting January 1, 2029. Owners of large buildings would be required to fill out annual reports disclosing energy use. Should buildings not meet the required energy performance standards adopted by the state, the bill outlines pathways to gradually decrease energy use and emissions until the building comes into compliance.

H.6055, An Act Relating to Motor and Motor Vehicles – Motor Vehicle Emissions Inspection Program requires the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management to adopt motor vehicle emissions standards based on California’s standards unless it finds the California standards will not achieve a greater pollution reduction than federal standards. Last year, the California Air Resources Board adopted regulations called Advanced Clean Cars II. The regulations are two-pronged. First, it requires an increasing number of zero-emission vehicles in the state until the percentage reaches 100% of sales by 2035, and second, the California Low-Emission Vehicle Regulation was amended to include more stringent standards for gasoline cars and heavier passenger trucks through 2025. California has made a $2.4 billion investment in vehicle incentives, charging infrastructure and public outreach. In 2021, there were an estimated 39 million people in the state of California.

The following new bills have been filed:

House Bill No. [5834](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5834.pdf) Lima, Cardillo, J. Brien**,**AN ACT RELATING TO PUBLIC FINANCE -- STATE FUNDS (Requires persons or entities receiving government funds to disclose the names of their contractors and subcontractors.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5834.pdf>

House Bill No. [5835](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5835.pdf) Lima, Cardillo, P. Morgan**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT - REGULATION OF SALES TAX CREDITS (Requires the attorney general’s office to regulate the sale of tax credits, including such actions as establishing qualifications and a certified list of those authorized to act as brokers and salespersons of tax credits.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5835.pdf>

House Bill No. [5838](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5838.pdf) Kennedy, Azzinaro, Diaz, Ackerman, Casimiro, Bennett**,**AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- FACILITATING BUSINESS RAPID RESPONSE TO STATE DECLARED DISASTER ACT OF 2023 (Provides thresholds for establishing presence, residency or doing business in the state for out-of-state employees and businesses during a state of emergency declared by either the Governor or the President of the United States.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5838.pdf>

House Bill No. [5902](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5902.pdf) Craven, Caldwell, Bennett, Morales**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- PAYMENT OF WAGES (Increases the criminal penalties for wage theft and employee misclassification.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5902.pdf>

House Bill No. [5927](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5927.pdf) Tanzi, Boylan, Cruz, Donovan, Speakman, Vella-Wilkinson, Felix, Hull, Spears, Potter**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- FAIR EMPLOYMENTS PRACTICES (Expands the definition of employee to include individuals under appointment or contract of hire or apprenticeship, volunteers or unpaid interns and decreases from 4 to 1 the number of employees required to trigger the designation of employer.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5927.pdf>

House Bill No. [5928](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5928.pdf) Henries, Stewart, Sanchez, Morales, Felix, Alzate, J. Lombardi**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- MINIMUM WAGES (Effective January 1, 2024, increases the minimum hourly wage to fourteen dollars and fifty cents ($14.50) to sixteen dollars and seventy-five cents ($16.75) the next year, the next year to nineteen dollars ($19.00).)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5928.pdf>

House Bill No. [5989](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5989.pdf) (Dept. of Labor and Training) McEntee, Caldwell, O'Brien, Casimiro, Kazarian, Spears, Fogarty, Dawson**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- EMPLOYMENT SECURITY -- GENERAL PROVISIONS (Eliminates the "until June 30, 2023" sunset on the increase in the total amount of earnings a partial-unemployment insurance claimant can receive before being entirely disqualified for unemployment insurance benefits.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5989.pdf>

House Bill No. [5990](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5990.pdf) Giraldo, Morales, Sanchez, Cruz, Stewart, Voas**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- RHODE ISLAND PARENTAL AND FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (Increases the amount of unpaid parental or family leave available to an employee, from thirteen (13) weeks to twenty-six (26) weeks, in any two (2) calendar years.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H5990.pdf>

House Bill No. [6003](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6003.pdf) O'Brien, McEntee, Craven, Caldwell, Dawson, Serpa, Bennett, Diaz, Corvese, Vella-Wilkinson**,**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/HouseText23/H6003.pdf>

House Bill No. [6014](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6014.pdf) Rea, Shallcross Smith, Chippendale, Newberry, Place, Nardone, Sanchez, McNamara, Noret, Cardillo**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- STATEWIDE TANGIBLE PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION (Phases in a permanent tax exemption over 5 years for tangible personal property of businesses of less than $250,000 of assessed value. Provides reimbursement from state revenues for the amount of lost tax revenue resulting from the exemption.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6014.pdf>

House Bill No. [6055](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6055.pdf) Cortvriend, Tanzi, Speakman, McGaw, Handy, Spears, Potter, Carson**,**AN ACT RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES -- MOTOR VEHICLE EMISSIONS INSPECTION PROGRAM (Requires the DEM adopt motor vehicle emissions standards based on California's promulgated standards; provided that, the California standards achieve greater motor vehicle pollution reductions than the federal standards as required by § 31-47.1-1(a).)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6055.pdf>

House Bill No. [6079](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6079.pdf) Sanchez, Morales, Felix, Cardillo**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- WORKERS' COMPENSATION -- BENEFITS (Prevents employers from discriminating against an employee because the employee has exercised a right and worker's compensation benefits.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6079.pdf>

House Bill No. [6107](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6107.pdf) Cotter, Casimiro, Carson, Donovan, Boylan, Cruz, Speakman, Kazarian, Spears, Stewart**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- RESIDENTIAL RENEWABLE ENERGY SYSTEM TAX CREDIT (Allows a taxpayer to donate residential renewable energy system tax credits to nonprofit organizations and subtract the corresponding amount of credits from federal adjusted gross income.)

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText23/HouseText23/H6107.pdf>