**Last Week at the State House**

**Minimum Wage Bill Filed in Senate**

The Senate sent a message loud and clear as it assigned the number S.1 to the minimum wage increase bill. Rhode Island’s current minimum wage, $11.50 per hour, went into effect October 1, 2020. S.1 proposes to increase the minimum wage to $12.25 on October 1, 2021, $13.00 on October 1, 2022, $14.00 on October 1, 2023 and $15.00 on October 1, 2024. Rhode Island has the 14th highest minimum wage in the country. (Although New York, at $12.50 for most of the state, is complicated, as NYC has its own rules for different employers.)

Massachusetts raised its minimum wage to $13.50 as of January 1, 2021 and will statutorily go to $14.25 January 1, 2022 and to $15.00 January 1, 2023. Massachusetts currently has the third highest minimum wage requirement in the country – following the District of Columbia ($15.00) and Washington state ($13.69). Connecticut is currently at $12.00 per hour and is set to go to $13.00 August 1, 2021; $14.00 July 1, 2022; and $15.00 June 1, 2023. Connecticut is tied for 9th highest minimum wage in the country.

President-elect Biden has called for an increase in the federal minimum wage which is $7.25 per hour. Eighteen states have a $7.25 per hour minimum wage.

**Medical Marijuana in the Workplace**

H.5021 has been introduced again in the House. The description is a little misleading, so the Chamber wanted to call it to your attention. The link to the bill can be found below. The legislation states that an employer cannot refuse to hire, or fire, or take any other action related to employment based on an employee’s possession of a medical marijuana card or for testing positive for marijuana. The bill addresses medical marijuana use, not adult non-medical marijuana use. H.5021 does allow an employer to take action if an employee possesses marijuana while working or if the employee is impaired during employment hours. The bill fails to carve out employees who must be “drug-free” under federal requirements. Any employee aggrieved under the bill would be entitled to retain her/his job, receive any amounts lost through the process in wages or benefits and to be paid his/her litigation costs that were incurred.

**This Week At the State House**

On Thursday, the Senate Finance Committee will be getting an update on the Federal CARES Act funding as well as a briefing surrounding additional federal aid passed by Congress in December that could provide options to the State’s budget. The virtual hearing will take place at 4:00pm and will be live streamed on <http://www.rilegislature.gov/CapTV/Pages/default.aspx>

The following new bills have been filed:

House Bill No. [5012](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H5012.pdf) Slater**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- NURSING HOME STAFFING AND QUALITY CARE ACT (Mandates minimum staffing levels and standards for quality care for nursing homes and their residents.)

House Bill No. [5013](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H5013.pdf) Slater**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- PERSONAL INCOME TAX (Raises the earned income tax credit from fifteen percent (15%) to twenty percent (20%) for tax years beginning on or after January 1, 2021.)

House Resolution No. [5015](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H5015.pdf) Slater**,**JOINT RESOLUTION MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF $140,000 TO URBAN VENTURES (Authorizes the appropriation of the sum of one hundred and forty thousand dollars ($140,000) to Urban Ventures for operations and to implement activities assisting small businesses within the state of Rhode Island.)

House Resolution No. [5019](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H5019.pdf) Lombardi**,**JOINT RESOLUTION CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY AND ASSESS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN IMPROVED MEDICARE-FOR-ALL-TYPE SINGLE PAYER PROGRAM IN THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND (Creates a 19 member commission to study and assess implementing an improved Medicare-for-all-type single payer program in RI, and who would report back to the Senate and House 1 year from the date of passage, and expire 2 years from the date of passage.)

House Bill No. [5021](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H5021.pdf) Slater**,**AN ACT RELATING TO FOOD AND DRUGS -- THE EDWARD O. HAWKINS AND THOMAS C. SLATER MEDICAL MARIJUANA ACT (Prevents employers from refusing to hire or discriminating against individuals for marijuana use and positive test results.)

Senate Bill No. [1](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0001.pdf) Quezada, Ruggerio, McCaffrey, Goodwin, Cano**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- MINIMUM WAGES (Gradually increase the minimum wage from eleven dollars and fifty cents ($11.50) per hour to fifteen dollars ($15.00) per hour, over 4 years.)

Senate Bill No. [2](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0002.pdf) Goodwin, Ruggerio, McCaffrey, Lawson, Euer**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- NURSING HOME STAFFING AND QUALITY CARE ACT (Mandates minimum staffing levels and standards for quality care for nursing homes and their residents.)

Senate Bill No. [4](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0004.pdf) Miller, Goldin, Valverde, Goodwin, Felag**,**AN ACT RELATING TO INSURANCE -- THE TELEMEDICINE COVERAGE ACT (Amends the provisions of the telemedicine coverage act and provide coverage for telemedicine under Rhode Island Medicaid.)

Senate Bill No. [5](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0005.pdf) Miller, Pearson, Lawson, Kallman, Lombardo**,**AN ACT RELATING TO INSURANCE -- INDIVIDUAL HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE (Requires individual health insurers, large group health insurers and small employer health insurers to provide coverage for ten (10) categories of essential health benefits listed in the act.)