**This Week at the State House**

The General Assembly is on break this week.

**New Employment Data Released**

The Department of Labor and Training released its Labor Market Information March report. The number of Rhode Island-based jobs rose by 2,300 (+0.5%) in March. Over the year, the number of Rhode Island-based jobs is down 35,100, a 7.0 percent decrease. The March unemployment rate of 7.1 in Rhode Island is down two-tenths of a percentage point from February, while being up three and one-tenth percentage points from March 2020. What do the percentages really mean? When we look at the hard numbers, the picture becomes more clear. The total number of non-farm employment for Rhode Island in March was 457,600. Government jobs account for 62,500 of those jobs, leaving 395,100 jobs in the private sector. The two industry sectors that saw increases over March 2020, were specialty trade contractors in construction (+400 jobs), and manufacturing (+2400). Losses were reported for retail (-1500); transportation, warehouse & utilities (-1200); information (-800); financial activities including real estate (-1000); professional businesses and services (-4400); educational services (-1000); health care and social services (-5600); arts and entertainment (-2400); accommodation and food services (-9000); other services (-2200); and government (-3700). This information continues to raise concerns over the status of the State’s Unemployment Trust Fund. The Chamber continues to raise the need to use federal stimulus monies to shore up the fund and to not place the pandemic burden on employers for decades to come.

**Legislative Incentives to Work**

While the number of bills introduced on a daily basis is decreasing, there have been a number of proposals introduced to incentivize individuals to return to work. The suspension of the need to prove that an unemployment compensation claimant is actively looking for work, plus the additional $300 a week benefit offering is appearing to cause difficulties for businesses to find employees. Rhode Island is not alone. Many states are looking at various ways to address the problem – from offering financial incentives to return to work, to reinstituting the requirement to actively job search. As those in the business community know, incentives to return to work could cause great harm, if the funds to pay those incentives come from the Unemployment Trust Fund.

Last week, General Treasurer Magaziner introduced his solution in H.6249 and H.6250 (links are provided below).

H.6249 - From May 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022, an employee would be deemed partially unemployed if the person works less than full time and makes less than 150% of the weekly benefit rate to which they would have been entitled if totally unemployed and eligible. Current law allows for partial unemployment if the person makes less than 100% of the weekly benefit.

H.6250 – This bill creates a self-employment assistance program under DLT. If a person is working at least 35 hours a week to establish a business and has at least 18 weeks left in regular unemployment benefits, that person could qualify for self-employment assistance money which is equal to the unemployment benefit rate and is paid out of the unemployment trust fund. The person must submit an application for the program and take advantage of an entrepreneurial training, business counseling, technical assistance program approved by DLT. If the program participant decides that self-employment is not for him/her, then the person can transfer back to the regular unemployment program. The individual’s remaining eligible unemployment benefit weeks will be reduced by the number of weeks the person participated in the assistance program.

Two legislative bills – also addressing this issue – are H.6218 and S.808. These bills provide incentive benefits for persons collecting unemployment benefits who return to work, in the amount of $150 per week for 13 weeks based on a 40 hour work week with prorated benefits for persons working less than 40 hours. Upon completion of the 13-week period, additional compensation up to a maximum of $1,950 would be paid on a prorated basis. These benefits would expire on January 1, 2022.

The following new bills have been filed:

House Bill No. [6241](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6241.pdf) (Secretary of State) Lima, Casey**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT (Allows the continuance of the remote notarization following the expiration of the executive emergency order currently in effect and requires a certificate of any notarial act.) [H6241.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6241.pdf)

House Bill No. [6248](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6248.pdf) (General Treasurer) Caldwell, McEntee, Costantino, Carson, Hawkins, Baginski, Biah, Speakman**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (Creates paycheck protection program for small businesses of with 50 employees or less for forgivable loans of $50,000 or less modeled on federal program with sunset date of 6/30/2022.) [H6248.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6248.pdf)

House Bill No. [6249](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6249.pdf) (General Treasurer)  McEntee, Carson, Felix, Cortvriend, Phillips, Costantino, Giraldo, Fogarty, Caldwell, Kazarian**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- EMPLOYMENT SECURITY -- GENERAL PROVISIONS (Increases partial unemployment benefits by disregarding an amount of earnings when calculating weekly benefit rate with expiration date of 6/30/22.)

[H6249.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6249.pdf)

House Bill No. [6250](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6250.pdf) (General Treasurer) Cortvriend, McEntee, Caldwell, Carson, Speakman, Donovan, Cassar**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- EMPLOYMENT SECURITY -- BENEFITS (Creates a self-employment assistance program in the DLT.) [H6250.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6250.pdf)

House Bill No. [6253](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6253.pdf) McGaw, McNamara, Donovan, Cortvriend, Potter, Cassar, Carson, Speakman, Ackerman**,**AN ACT RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES - PARKING FACILITIES AND PRIVILEGES (Requires parking lots to designate parking spaces for electric vehicles/installation of charging stations for new existing public/private parking lots with fines for parking violations/compliance. Effective 7/1/21.) [H6253.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6253.pdf)

House Bill No. [6254](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6254.pdf) Casimiro, Vella-Wilkinson, Noret**,**AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- STANDARDS OF CONDUCT FOR NOTARIES PUBLIC (Codifies in the general laws the standards of conduct for notaries public in the state of Rhode Island by the secretary of state which came into effect on April 3, 2020. Takes effect on July 1, 2021; sunsets and expires on July 1, 2023.) [H6254.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6254.pdf)