**Last Week at the State House**

Last week saw a couple of business unfriendly bills pass. The Senate Labor Committee took testimony on S.172, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Equal Pay Data Collection and Reporting and then passed it on a 5-1 vote. The bill requires employers with 100 employees or more to file an annual report with the Department of Labor and Training providing employee compensation information broken down by age, gender, race, ethnicity, job category and occupation title. The Chamber provided testimony against passage of the bill. It is expected to be voted on by the members of the Senate this week. The Senate Labor Committee also passed S.509 on a 6-0 vote. S.509 requires employers to pay employees the same wage for “comparable work.” While meant to address gender pay inequality, this bill extends this wage payment system to religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age and ancestral origin. If an employer hires a female age 35 and pays her more than a 41 year old male because they want more diversity in the workplace, a lawsuit could be triggered based on age discrimination. It is also hard to determine “what is comparable work?” Both bills passed the Senate last year and died in the House.

The Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee amended and passed the plastic bag ban bill and held the plastic straw bill for further study. S.410 was created by a stakeholder group comprised of business and environmental representatives. As was stated in last week’s *Under the Dome*, the Governor brought both sides together to work out a compromise which was reflected in S.410. The bill banned retailers from providing single-use plastic bags and required them to charge a customer five cents for a paper bag should the customer require a bag. A few exceptions existed such as the very important restaurant wine bottle take-home bag. Every retailer was to be under the same rules to help with compliance issues. Certain members of the environmental community changed their position on S.410 calling for an elimination of the five cent per paper bag fee – siting a harm to the poorer communities. Interestingly, the same environmental groups advocated for a ten cent fee in the stakeholder meetings. It was the business community that suggested the fee be lowered to five cents to cover the additional cost of the paper bag. For the business participants in the stakeholder process, the last minute amendment was very disappointing.

**This Week at the State House**

Committees are voting on bills fast and furiously, signaling an approaching end to the 2013 legislative session. At the time this newsletter was written, the House Finance Committee has only posted a meeting for Tuesday, leaving the Thursday normal meeting time as a remote possibility for the unveiling of the House budget, although the following week would be more likely.

The **Senate Judiciary Committee is meeting on Tuesday** to vote on a number of bills. S.479, An Act Relating to Businesses and Professions – Real Estate Sales Disclosures, requires owners of real estate to provide and annual energy cost estimate to potential buyers. The estimate must be prepared by an “approved energy rater” registered with the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources. S.607, also applies to real estate disclosures and requires sellers state if the property is in a flood zone, if the seller has flood insurance (and if so, the amount of the annual premium), and details surrounding the historical frequency of water damage to the property and the amount of repairs necessary. Lastly, the committee plans to vote on S.493, a deceptive trade practice bill submitted by the Attorney General. This bill would place all businesses – even heavily regulated industries - under the Deceptive Trade Practice. Any business practice not specifically stated in a state regulation could be used to bring a case against the business. The goal of the bill is to allow the AG to participate in multi-state class action lawsuits; but it also places heavily regulated entities in a trap between competing state agencies.

**The Senate Commerce Committee** is set to pass both the Senate and House versions of the cash requirement bills. S.889 and H.5116 require retailers to accept cash as payment for goods or services. Exemptions are included for online internet sales.

On **Thursday, the House Environment Committee** is scheduled to vote on H.5671, the plastic bag ban bill. To date, the bill reflects the language adopted by the Governor’s stakeholder group. The Committee could post an amended version next week to mirror the Senate bill (S.410 above), but the committee may also adopt the compromise bill in its original form. The Committee will also take testimony on H.6126, An Act Relating to Food and Drugs – Disposable Food Service Containers. The bill prohibits most food establishments from preparing, selling, processing or providing food or beverages in or on a disposable food service container that is composed in whole or in part of polystyrene foam.

**The following resolution was read on the on House floor May 23, 2019. Congratulations to NRICC President/CEO on the House Resolution**

House Resolution No. [6144](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText19/HouseText19/H6144.pdf) Newberry, Mattiello, Shekarchi, Filippi, Ackerman**,**HOUSE RESOLUTION HONORING AND RECOGNIZING JOHN GREGORY FOR HIS SERVICE TO THE PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES IN THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

The following bill was filed last week:

House Bill No. [6159](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText19/HouseText19/H6159.pdf) Nardone, Place, Quattrocchi, Filippi, Roberts**,**AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- MECHANICAL TRADES (Provides for a limited license to be issued to HVAC service personnel to work on electrical wiring, equipment and components when servicing HVAC systems.)