**At the State House**

The State House will be open this week to legislators, staff and those with appointments, according to a notice by Department of Administration Director Brett Smiley. Anyone else is welcome to remain outside the building as long as social distancing is maintained.

On **Tuesday at 3:00 p.m., the House Finance Committee** is scheduled to discuss and to likely vote on a bill to close the $240 million gap in the current year fiscal budget. As this edition of Under the Dome is being written, the supplemental budget is still being discussed and the draft product has not been released. The deficit solution could include use of the State’s rainy day fund, as well as scoops of various programs such as the Oil Spill Prevention Administration and Response fund, the Underground Storage Tank Fund, and Rhode Island Resource Recovery just to name a few. The plan will also likely include use of the federal CARES Act funds. The bill to be considered by the committee will be posted online June 15th at <http://status.rilin.state.ri.us/documents/agenda-16911.pdf>

The Chamber has submitted a letter asking the legislature NOT to include language in the supplemental budget to make permanent Governor Raimondo’s Executive Order requiring health insurance to cover telemedicine for all medical visits without co-pays, cost sharing or preauthorization from a primary care physician. The Chamber made clear that the business community supports telemedicine as a useful tool to enhance healthcare; but permanently banning any requirement for co-pays, cost sharing or preauthorization protocols could lead to high utilization of the health care system with no way to curb costs or to dissuade unnecessary visits. Additionally, without further defining what must be included in a “visit,” a provider could bill the same amount for a quick phone call, as is billed for an in-person visit that includes taking of vitals, etc. These are details that should be a part of the telemedicine cost-effective discussion prior to passage of legislation. The business community cannot shoulder the expected increase in premiums, especially at this difficult time.

The **Senate Finance Committee** is scheduled to discuss the supplemental budget **Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. in anticipation of House passage**. This would allow the Senate Finance Committee to meet again to discuss only changes made by the House floor, if any, and move the bill to the Senate calendar more quickly.

The House and Senate are expected to vote on the supplemental budget this week. Sessions are scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday.

**Last Week**

The **House Finance Committee** met last week. On the agenda was **H.7246, An Act Relating to Taxation-Historic Tax Credits 2013**. This bill calls for the repeal of the sunset of the Historic Tax Credit program. The program was very successful in the past, but was also very costly. The State has been unable to fund the program the last few years due to budget constraints. If H.7246 fails to pass, the Historic Tax Credit program would be eliminated from statute and restarting a similar program would take action by the House, Senate and Governor. If the bill passes or is amended to extend the sunset for another year or two (more likely), then the legislature could simply fund the program in a future budget without the need to pass legislation to re-create the details of the program.

The **Small Business Committee** reviewed a presentation given by the RI Hospitality Association outlining what has happened in the **restaurant and hotel industries as a result of the COVID19** crisis. Between March 1 and April 16, 60% of operators temporarily closed their businesses, 93% of restaurants laid off or furloughed employees (roughly 40,000 people). One hundred ninety million dollars ($190 million) in restaurants sales were lost in April. The March meals and beverage tax declined 35.6% compared to March 2019. On average, RI restaurant operators reported an 83% decline in sales from May 1 – May 15. On the hotel side, the March hotel tax declined 55.9% when compared to March 2019. Hotel occupancy in April, 2020 was only 21.7%. In April, 2019, the occupancy rate was 65%. These are sobering statistics. As the economy continues to re-open, please consider enjoying food from one of our state’s restaurant treasures.

The following new bills were filed last week:

House Bill No. [8015](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText20/HouseText20/H8015.pdf) Edwards**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES - GENERAL POWERS (Allows city/town/fire district to continue operations in state/local emergency when financial budget process is interrupted and to conduct virtual meetings during emergencies retroactive to March 9, 2020.)

Senate Bill No. [2857](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText20/SenateText20/S2857.pdf)  Coyne**,**AN ACT RELATING TO FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS -- THE ELDER ADULT FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION PREVENTION ACT (Requires employees of regulated financial institutions to report suspected financial exploitation of elder adults to the office of healthy aging and provide authority to the regulated financial institution to place a temporary hold on transactions.)

Senate Bill No. [2864](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText20/SenateText20/S2864.pdf)  Conley**,**AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES - GENERAL POWERS (Allows city/town/fire district to continue operations in state/local emergency when financial budget process is interrupted and to conduct virtual meetings during emergencies retroactive to March 9, 2020.)

Senate Resolution No. [2867](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText20/SenateText20/S2867.pdf)  Metts, Ruggerio, McCaffrey, Goodwin, Coyne**,**SENATE RESOLUTION CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE TO REVIEW AND PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS ON POLICIES PERTAINING TO THE RHODE ISLAND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS’ BILL OF RIGHTS (LEOBOR) (Creates a 13 member task force to study and provide recommendations on policies pertaining to the RI Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights, and who would report back to the Senate by February 9, 2021, and expires on May 9, 2021.)