**This Week At the State House**

If all goes well, this will be the last week of the legislative session for the summer. The rules change during this week in that bills can be posted in committee for a vote without 48 hour notice to the public. Duplicate bills (bills that have previously been voted on by the House or Senate) can also go straight to the floor for a vote without going through a committee vote. When the week comes to an end, it is very likely that hundreds of bills will be ready to go to the Governor’s desk. This is normal for the end of session. The House and Senate usually transmit bills to the Governor for consideration in “batches” to give the Governor time to review the bills. For that reason, Under the Dome may not be published for a few weeks as we wait to provide a thorough review of the bills that have become law in 2021.

**Monday Bills Scheduled for votes in Committees**

The following bills are scheduled for a vote in committees on Monday:

H.5131 and S.155, Acts Relating to Single Use Plastic Straws – the amended bills ban food establishments from providing single use plastic straws to consumers unless the consumer requests one. The first and second violation result in a notice to the establishment. Subsequent offenses result in a fine of $25 per violation up to $300 annually. House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.

S.688 SubA, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Temporary Disability Insurance Benefits, increases TCI benefits to five weeks in a benefit year starting January 1, 2022 and increases to six weeks starting January 1, 2023. This matches H.6090 SubA that passed the House floor last Friday. House Finance Committee.

H.5855 and S.550, Acts Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Rhode Island Whistle Blower’s Protection Act. These bills prohibit an employer from reporting or threatening to report an employee’s immigration status to ICE because the employee is involved in a whistle blowing protected act. House Labor Committee.

S.736 SubA and H.5867 SubA, Acts Relating to Court and Civil Procedure – Causes of Action, eliminate the defense for a manufacturer or seller in a products liability case that the cause of an injury, death or damage was due to an alteration or modification of the product. Today this defense is a complete bar to recovery. If S.736 SubA and H.5867 SubA pass, the liability would instead be determined by comparative negligence – what percentage was attributable to the alteration versus the percentage attributable to the original product. Senate Judiciary Committee.

**Tuesday Hearing**

On Tuesday, H.6370, An Act Relating to Food and Drugs – Adult Use Marijuana will be heard in the House Finance Committee at the Rise. This is the House version of the legalization of marijuana. While the Senate did hold hearings on its version earlier this year, the House is holding the hearing this week. This should set the stage for negotiations over the summer. The bill can viewed at [H6370.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6370.pdf) Written testimony may be submitted at HouseFinance@rilegislature.gov Indicate your name, bill number and viewpoint (for/against/neither) at the top of the message. The deadline for written testimony is Tuesday at 1:00 pm. For verbal testimony requests, [CLICK HERE](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=LBHmn1akN0aJ3A8oTO_8ZpR-enp9FkxEjcJIbBjmg-tUQVhDN01JSFhNNFRDWjdMRjk2VllKSjRTSy4u) The deadline to register to verbally testify is Monday, 4:00 pm.

**Last Week At the State House**

The House passed the $13.1 billion budget with few changes. An amendment did pass to waive interest and penalties on the taxable portion of PPP loan forgiveness in tax year 2020, provided the tax is paid in full by March 31, 2022. The amendment also requires the tax administrator to create instructions for making tax payments on the PPP portion of the income tax. The intent is to provide an alternative to taxpayers so that they will not have to go back and refile their 2020 taxes. The budget has been transmitted to the Senate for its consideration.

**House Labor Committee Passes Pay Equity Bill**

Last Friday, the House Labor Committee passed H.5261 SubA and S.270 SubA, the pay equity bills. The Chamber has been working with the proponents and members of the business community over the past three months in an attempt to strike a balance between eliminating pay inequity for women and minorities, and adopting safeguards to allow businesses to compensate employees for legitimate business reasons. The SubAs reflect more than twenty changes to the original bills. The final negotiations, which took place over Father’s Day weekend, were mediated by the Speaker of House. The Chamber thanks him for his hard work in getting the bills over the finish line in a manner workable for the business community. Additionally, Representative Susan Donovan and House Majority Whip Katherine Kazarian put in many hours to help the compromise along.

The Chamber will provide a detailed narrative of the bills once they pass and become law. At this time (the bills could be amended prior to final passage), the bills are written to become effective January 1, 2023; but businesses can help themselves by preparing for the new law prior to 2023.

The Chamber would like to thank (in addition to individual businesses that provided input) the many business organizations who participated in process: Rhode Island Hospitality Association, Rhode Island Business Coalition, Rhode Island Society for Human Resource Managers, The Chamber of Commerce Coalition, The Rhode Island Banker’s Association and the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. From the Proponents side, we thank Rhode Island Working Families and the Women’s Fund of Rhode Island. In the words of Henry Ford, “If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person’s point of view and see things from that person’s angle as well as from your own.”

The following new bills of interest have been filed this week:

House Bill No. [6464](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6464.pdf) Tanzi, Shekarchi, Biah, Ajello, Cassar, Shallcross Smith, Morales, Cortvriend, Ranglin-Vassell, Kislak**,**AN ACT RELATING TO PROPERTY -- RESIDENTIAL LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT (Provides for the sealing and unsealing of court files in residential eviction proceedings and provides that any eviction for nonpayment of rent, in which the rent arrearage is paid through a rent relief program, shall remain sealed permanently.) [H6464.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6464.pdf)

House Bill No. [6467](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6467.pdf)  Nardone**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY - PATIENT VISITATION RIGHTS (Department of health to promulgate rules and regulations for essential caregivers at healthcare facilities during a declared emergency.) [H6467.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6467.pdf)

House Bill No. [6468](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6468.pdf) Slater**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- GREEN NEW DEAL ACT OF 2021 (Establishes a climate action plan to eliminate the state's dependence on fossil fuel energy generation of electricity and replace the required generation of electricity from clean energy resources by calendar year 2036.) [H6468.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/HouseText21/H6468.pdf)

Senate Bill No. [972](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0972.pdf)  DiPalma**,**AN ACT RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES -- MEDICAL ASSISTANCE -- LONG TERM CARE SERVICES AND FINANCE REFORM (Increases the wages for direct care workers employed by home nursing care and home care providers licensed by the Rhode Island department of health.) [S0972.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0972.pdf)

Senate Bill No. [980](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0980.pdf) Picard**,**AN ACT RELATING TO INSURANCE -- FINANCIAL SERVICES (Updates the Credit for Reinsurance, Risk Based Capital and Insurance Holding Company statutes to the current National Association of Insurance Commissioners standard.) [S0980.pdf (state.ri.us)](http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText21/SenateText21/S0980.pdf)