

RHODE ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2015

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The 2016 state budget bill includes tax credits for businesses in exchange for creating high-quality jobs.
- The General Assembly eliminated the sales tax that all nonmanufacturing businesses previously paid on their electric, natural gas and heating fuel bills.
- Legislators cut the minimum corporate tax, paid by about 60,000 businesses in the state, from \$500 to \$450.
- The budget includes a package of economic development incentives and real estate tax breaks to attract companies and spur economic growth, including programs to encourage redevelopment, to attract suppliers to serve Rhode Island companies, to encourage proposals on the land in Providence formerly occupied by Route 195 and to help small businesses.
- The Assembly added \$350,000 to the budget for the Polaris Manufacturing Extension Partnership to assist Rhode Island manufacturers.
- Legislators removed a provision of law prohibiting construction of a hotel at Twin River in Lincoln.

EDUCATION

- The state budget includes a \$20 million appropriation to a new School Building Authority Capital Fund, which is aimed at reducing the state's reliance on borrowing for school construction and encouraging continued upkeep of buildings to prevent higher replacement costs.
- Lawmakers continued for a fifth consecutive year to fully fund the education funding formula for cities and towns next year, an increase of \$35.8 million over this year.
- The budget includes \$1.4 million to help expand all-day kindergarten to the seven communities that remain without it.
- Legislators concurred with the governor's request for an additional \$7.5 million for higher education.

CONSUMER/QUALITY OF LIFE

- Lawmakers eliminated the state income tax on Social Security benefits for 33,400 Rhode Island tax filers, effective Jan. 1, 2016.
- Legislators raised the minimum wage from \$9 to \$9.60, effective Jan. 1, 2016.
- The Assembly approved increases in the minimum wage for tipped workers from \$2.89 to \$3.39 on Jan. 1, 2016, and to \$3.89 on Jan. 1, 2017.
- The Assembly prohibited employers, employment agencies and labor organizations from discriminating against any job applicant based on pregnancy, childbirth or a related medical condition.
- The budget bill included an increase to the earned income credit for low- and moderate-wage earners from 10 percent of the federal credit to 12.5 percent.
- Lawmakers permanently enacted a measure allowing low-income parents to qualify for child-care assistance while participating in work-readiness programs.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- The Comprehensive Community–Police Relationship Act of 2015 passed the General Assembly and will require all police departments to continue to collect data on race at traffic stops.
- Legislation to increase the penalties for sex trafficking of a minor as well as for obstruction or interference with enforcement of sex trafficking laws passed the legislature.
- The legislature approved bills that require individuals convicted of murder to spend more time behind bars before being eligible for parole.
- Under the Identity Theft Protection Act of 2015, anyone who stores, collects, processes, maintains, acquires, uses, licenses or owns personal information about a Rhode Island resident will be required to implement reasonable security procedures and practices.
- The General Assembly has approved legislation to require public middle schools, junior highs and high schools to have opioid antagonist kits on their premises.

ENVIRONMENT

- Legislators passed a law that amends the Rhode Island Cesspool Act of 2007, including replacing individual sewage disposal systems with onsite wastewater treatment systems and would require cesspool removal or replacement upon the transfer of the property.
- Lawmakers streamlined the permitting process and addressed gaps in wetland protections. The law requires the establishment of a single set of state standards for freshwater wetland buffers and setbacks.
- The budget includes an infrastructure bank seeded with \$5 million from federal and other sources to loan cities and towns funds to make buildings more energy efficient.

HEALTH

- The budget bill contained funding to maintain the state health insurance exchange, HealthSource RI, but the cost of the program will now be assessed in the same manner and rate that is used for federally facilitated exchanges for individuals and small businesses.
- The Caregiver Advise, Record and Enable (CARE) Act allows patients entering a hospital in Rhode Island to designate a specific person who will help care for him or her upon release, and establishes a means by which the hospital shall keep that caregiver informed about the patient's location and how to provide the proper care at home was approved by the legislature.
- The General Assembly has approved legislation to enable the creation of tax-free investment accounts similar to 529 college savings plans to support services for disabled Rhode Islanders when they reach adulthood.

ELECTIONS/GOOD GOVERNMENT

- The General Assembly passed laws that require candidates and political action committees to file a copy of the next bank statement from their campaign account, to maintain separate campaign accounts exclusively for campaign funds, and requiring the appointment of a treasurer or deputy treasurer to any campaign account that reaches or expends at least \$10,000 in any year.

- The General Assembly included structural changes to Medicaid in this year's budget. The changes were originally proposed by the governor, but lawmakers reduced cuts to hospitals and nursing homes.
- Lawmakers endorsed a pension settlement with most public employee unions that had been approved by Superior Court Judge Sarah Taft-Hartley.

VETERANS

- The General Assembly amended the Rhode Island Fair Housing Practices Act by adding military status discrimination as an unlawful housing practice.
- Legislation that requires retail establishments within Rhode Island that offer a veterans' preference or discount to honor the Rhode Island operator's license designation as proof of military service also passed the legislature this year.
- An additional piece of veterans' legislation that passed the General Assembly increases the permissible funeral expense for a veteran who dies at the veterans' home from \$5,000 to \$10,000.
- The legislature approved bills which gives veterans priority for housing rental subsidies and housing retention assistance under the Rhode Island Housing Resource Act.
- Legislation allowing qualifying veterans and their spouses and children under 25 years old to pay resident tuition and fees at state colleges upon filing a letter of intent to reside in the state while so enrolled passed both chambers of the State House.
- The General Assembly also passed legislation that entitles a surviving relative to receive a Purple Heart license plate transfer upon the death of the Purple Heart recipient.

OTHER

- The General Assembly passed a law mandating that any dog lawfully seized as a result of dog fighting or trained, tormented, badgered, baited, or used for the purpose of unprovoked attacks upon human beings or domestic animals be placed in the care of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for the dog's physical care and suitability for transfer to an appropriate rescue organization or adoptive home.
- Lawmakers passed legislation that allows bake sales to operate near polling places in Rhode Island.