### VICTORIA



## State Senate — District 38 —

#### **May Newsletter:**

#### Last Several Weeks of Session







Dear Friends and Neighbors,

A lot has happened in the Senate in the past month. Our Senate President Dominick Ruggerio, who oversaw the flow of bills in the Senate and negotiates the state budget and bills with the House of Representatives, passed away after a couple years' battle with cancer. We were heartbroken by the news and, after the funeral, had to proceed quickly to elect a new Senate President. The Senate Majority Leader, Val Lawson, is now the new Senate President, and I voted for her because of her record of supporting issues that matter to working families (worker protections, public education, healthcare, and much more).

We have a lot to accomplish in the last 3 weeks of session. In Rhode Island, we have to pass a balanced budget, and right now we are looking at a ~\$100 million budget shortfall split among 3 categories of funding: RIPTA (to stop service cuts), state aid for public schools (increased after the student counts were revised), and the pension fund. At the same time, I've been hearing from a lot of people in the district that we need to bolster our healthcare workforce, particularly primary care physicians (see below for SEIU 1199 updates). In addition to closing the budget gap, these bigger bills are still up in the air:

- CRMC reform (many competing proposals but S-775 is the one Save the Bay and vast majority of other organizations and advocates are supporting)
- The Bottle Bill (see below and the EcoRI article)

- Assault weapons ban (2025-H 5436, 2025-S 0359)
- The Senate's healthcare package (most have passed the Senate and are pending in the House)
- Speaker of the House's housing package (Passed the House; In Senate Housing & Municipal Government, we had the initial hearings last night in the Senate and are doing our due diligence)
- Medicaid reimbursement rate increases: many healthcare workers in the district contacted me about these bills:
  - (S.0873/H.5790) Family Health Care Act Increases Medicaid reimbursement rates for physicians and advanced practice providers
  - (S.0848/H6095) Medicaid Reinvestment Act Improves Medicaid payments to hospitals
  - (S.0681/H.5832) Health Insurance Fairness Act Makes Rhode Island commercial reimbursement more competitive with Massachusetts and Connecticut

For federal updates: Our Congress members (Jack Reed, Sheldon Whitehouse, Seth Magaziner, Gabe Amo) are hard at work pushing back against unlawful power grabs, cuts to programs like Social Security or Medicaid, and much more. They have newsletters so you can get up-to-date information about what's happening and how it impacts Rhode Island.

#### **Happening at the State House**



#### Hearings on Bottle Recycling and Extended Producer Responsibility Bills:

In our Senate Environment committee, we heard hours and hours of testimony on the proposed Bottle Bill, which incentivizes recycling with a 10-cent deposit on beverage containers, refundable upon return.

We got a demonstration in the State House parking lot: Companies like CLYNK offer user-friendly redemption options. Their system allows consumers to bag containers, scan a barcode, and drop them off at designated stations, with refunds processed within 24–48 hours.

#### Why this matters:

- Narragansett Bay is estimated to hold 1,000 tons of microplastics, which threaten marine life and human health
- With bottle redemption, the bottles go into a separate recycling stream and the recycling rate approaches 90% in states like Oregon, significantly higher than Rhode Island's current 26% recycling rate.

- Read and share the full article by ecoRI here:
- Attps://ecori.org/study-commission-recommends-r-i...
- Tackling prescription drug costs

Rhode Island is taking a stand against inflated prescription drug prices. The Senate has passed two bills to ban "spread pricing," a practice where pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) pay one price to the pharmacy for a drug (say \$15), then charge a higher price to the insurance company (say \$50), pocketing the difference (say \$35). These bills aim to lower drug costs for patients and protect independent pharmacies. Read more here

- RI Senate approves bill to restrict cell phone use by students during the school
  day: Currently, 15 states have passed laws or enacted policies that ban or restrict cell phone use
  in the classroom and some of the largest school districts in the country have implemented similar
  policies. Read more here
- Public Testimony Now Posted Online: The RI Senate has enacted a rule change to publish
  written public testimony online, enhancing transparency and public access to legislative
  proceedings. You may view public documents for any committee
  here: https://www.rilegislature.gov/senators/SenateComDocs/Pages/default.aspx

### Submit Testimony for Shoreline Access Bills

### SHORELINE ACCESS BILLS 2025

S-716

Requires public hearing & review procedure for parking changes near public rights-ofway to the shore

S-349

Option to preserve abandoned roads as walking, biking trails

S-626

Towns must maintain a list of public rights-of-ways & include in official maps

Submit Letters of Support



A few people have been asking about the road abandonment bill, so here is some important context.

Top video is my introduction of the road abandonment bill this year Bottom video is Save the Bay's testimony of support in the same hearing.



We have a new link that'll help you submit letters of support for the shoreline access bills and send a copy to your State Representative and State Senator, all from one form: https://actionnetwork.org/letters/express-your-support-for-shoreline-access-in-ri/



### Monthly Commuter Rail Working Group Meetings

In the last meeting our working group of local commuter rail advocates (mostly from Westerly) discussed an economic benefits study to make the case for commuter rail expansion.

Next meeting scheduled for: Monday June 9th, 9:30am at Westerly Library 2nd Floor

Thank you to everyone who has sent letters so far! For those who haven't, use this form to send a letter to Gov McKee and your Congress Member (you can also customize the letter): https://actionnetwork.org/letters/asking-congressmembers-to-support-westerly-station-upgrade-for-commuter-rail

### Solidarity With Health Care Workers

Showing solidarity with hundreds of healthcare workers, union members, and community allies gathered at the Rhode Island State House for the "No

Cuts to Care" rally, organized by SEIU 1199 New England.

The demonstration was a response to proposed federal Medicaid cuts and the need to raise reimbursement rates across the board (Medicaid, Medicare, commercial insurance rates) to stabilize hospital systems that are struggling financially and retain our healthcare workforce. I've been hearing from a lot of people in my district that this is urgent; it's getting harder and harder to find a primary care doctor and get healthcare in a timely manner.





## Supporting Essential EMS Services

Ambulance Corps with a \$5,000 legislative grant, which went directly toward purchasing intubation and suction equipment to help save lives during choking and respiratory distress situations. This investment ensures our first responders are equipped with the tools they need when every second counts.

I'm also working alongside Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee and Rep. Azzinaro on legislation that would reimburse emergency medical services for providing care directly in someone's home—a forward-thinking approach known as community paramedicine. It's about expanding access, cutting unnecessary ER visits, and keeping

care where it matters most—close to home.

## Supporting Literacy Volunteers of Washington County

Proud to support the work of Literacy Volunteers of Washington County, Inc. with a legislative grant this year! This volunteer-driven organization provides free, one-on-one tutoring to adults working to improve their reading, writing, and English language skills—empowering individuals to get better jobs, help their kids with school, and engage more fully in their communities. Thank you to all the tutors and staff who make this life-changing work possible in South County!





### Westerly Senior Center Services Fair with Lt Gov Sabina Matos

Another great day visiting folks at the Westerly Senior Center and talking about:

S-770 a bill I'm working with Lt Gov Sabina Matos, for fair pricing (ensuring in-store shoppers get the same food discounts as those using digital coupons) at grocery stores



S-16, a bill I'm working on with AARP Rhode Island, to regulate crypto-ATM's, which criminals are using to scam people out of tens of thousands of dollars

my work with Lt Gov Sabina Matos to advance commuter rail efforts in Westerly and the rest of Rhode Island

Thank you, Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos, for graciously hosting a Senior Services event! We were thrilled to bring valuable resources and care to our senior community in Westerly.

A huge shoutout to our community partners: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, PACE, United Way, RI Office of Veterans Services, Town Manager Shawn Lacey, Councilors Mike Niemeyer, Bill Aiello, and Alex Healy



# Land next to Winnapaug Pond conserved for recreational access

A great example of a pro-conservation, pro-resiliency, pro-public access project:

The old Water Wizz property on Atlantic Ave, near Misquamicut beach, has been permanently conserved and protected from development. Our Congress members helped obtain \$2.6 million from NOAA (through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act) to acquire the property, and the Westerly town rec department is excited for all the opportunities it will open up once it's cleaned up for kayaking and Winnapaug pond access.

Unfortunately future funding for similar projects seems unlikely with all the cuts in NOAA funding. But in the meantime, thank you to the Town of Westerly, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Senator Jack Reed, Congressmember Seth Magaziner, Congressmember Gabe Amo, Governor Dan McKee, Coastal Resources Management Council of Rhode Island, Save The Bay - Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management for conserving this land for future generations!

## Celebrating AAPI Month at URI & the State House

On May 1st, I had the honor of joining the **University of Rhode Island** to help kick off Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. The celebration was full of pride, culture, and connection—hosted by the amazing team at the Multicultural Student Services Center.

Congratulations to the inspiring student leaders who won Asian Cultural Ambassador Awards

On May 13th, for the RI State House celebration, Senator Ujifusa and I recognized five outstanding K-12 educators in Rhode Island who go above-and-beyond to teach Asian-American history and culture in the classroom. We were very inspired by how passionate these teachers are about their work.





Honorees included:

- · Kristin San Bento of Davies Career and Technical High School
- · Donald Pepperd of Scituate High School
- · Suha Venkataraman of Classical High School
- · Michelle Maczka of Classical High School
- · Sandra Makielski of Davisville Middle School



### **Honoring Veterans & Veteran Services**

This Memorial Day, we honor the brave men and women who gave everything for our freedom.

We're proud to share that the Rhode Island Senate has passed bills this year to permanently waive all fees for special license plates for Bronze Star and Distinguished Service Cross recipients — a small but powerful way to recognize their heroic service. \( \bigcup \)

Thank you to all who served and sacrificed.

Please share these services with any friends or loved ones who have served:

1. Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services (RIVets) has ample information available to the state's veterans pertinent to benefits eligibility. They provide assistance in matching veterans with necessary benefits/determining their eligibility.

Veterans seeking claims assistance, benefits eligibility clarification, assistance finding discharge paperwork, and the like should fill out the RIVets Intake Form:

https://vets.ri.gov/rivets

2. Project Outreach of Westerly seeks to ensure that all veterans gain access to the VA and eligibility to all the programs they offer. They provide guidance to complete required documents and ensure they have proper representation at the VA.

https://www.westerlylibrary.org/event/project-outreach-veterans-assistance-0

Representatives of Project Outreach are often at the Westerly Library on scheduled dates; check the Westerly Library's calendar

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