



State Senate — District **38** —

June Newsletter: RI's 2025 Legislative Session in Review



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

In the last week of session, amendments on bills are flying back and forth between the House and Senate chambers. We need to pass the same version of each bill in both chambers order for it to make it to the Governor's desk for signing. So the last night is incredibly long - it went from 2pm to 2am!

State Representative Tina Spears and I are hosting an end-of-session town hall to discuss what happened - the new laws & state budget we passed and how it impacts our community. People from across South County are invited to attend.

 **The Bills, the Buzz, and the Big Decisions: RI's Legislative Year in Review**

Join State Senator Victoria Gu and Representative Tina Spears for a lively discussion on what bills passed in the State House, what stalled, how the new laws could impact our community, and give your

feedback on priorities for next year. Topics include: environment & shoreline access, healthcare, housing, education & technology



Date: Monday July 7th



Time: 6-7:30pm



**Location: Quonochontaug Grange Hall, 5662 Post Road,
Charlestown, RI, 02813**

RSVP and Submit Questions



The Bills, The Buzz, The Big Decisions: The Rhode Island Legislative Year in Review

With RI State Rep Tina Spears &
RI State Senator Victoria Gu

Come give feedback on next year's
priorities!



Mon July 7, 2025 6-7:30pm
5662 Post Rd, Charlestown
RSVP & ask questions:
victoria4ri.com/town-hall

Highlights of 2025

Keep in mind, across several categories of funding, we had to close a \$100 million deficit this year, and that involves making hard tradeoffs. This is a pared-down summary with a focus on South County:

Environment and Healthcare Budget- Wins for South County

- I supported a budget amendment (and it passed) to provide \$5 million in funding for the **Charlestown Breachway repairs and dredging** (through shifting money from other projects in the state capitol improvement plan)
- Increased **reimbursement rates for primary care and federally qualified health centers (such as Wood River Health)** and new funding for **12 family medicine residency positions** at Thundermist Health Centers

Additional Revenue Streams Impacting South County

- Closed the loophole on **whole-home short-term rentals**: Previously they had not been paying the 5% hotel tax; under the new budget they are, and the funds will be split 50% to state homelessness services, 25% to the regional tourism district, 25% to the city/town
- 0.5% Tax on **Non-Owner-Occupied Homes Over \$1 Million**: This has been considered for many years and was incorporated into the state budget we passed this year. The funding will go towards affordable housing development.

Education and Transportation Budget:

- **State aid for public schools**: Overall education aid to school districts increased by \$59.2 million. We also increased aid for special education by \$2.4 million spread across all districts
- A sustainable funding source for **RIPTA and Paratransit**: RIPTA is receiving \$15 million which is about half of what it needed. I supported a budget amendment introduced by Senator Zurier to fully fund RIPTA by redirecting some funding from RIDOT to RIPTA in a budget-neutral way, but it failed by small margin. There will be some service cuts and public meetings in advance of those service cuts. For now, we expect the Ride Anywhere Paratransit program, which serves people with disabilities throughout the entire state, to continue running.

Bill Updates

- **CRMC reform** (S-775 is what Save the Bay and vast majority of other organizations and advocates are supporting but S-998A is what ended up passing)
- **The Bottle Bill** (a pared down version to conduct the statewide needs assessment passed the House & Senate)
- **Assault weapons ban** (S-0359 was amended to only address sale & manufacturing and then passed the House & Senate. It bans the sale or

manufacture of assault weapons in Rhode Island; it does not require anyone who owns these weapons already to do anything)

- The Senate's [healthcare package](#)
- Speaker of the House's [housing package](#)
- **Restricting 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](#)

For federal updates: Our Congress members (Jack Reed, Sheldon Whitehouse, Seth Magaziner, Gabe Amo) have newsletters so you can get up-to-date information about what's happening and how it impact Rhode Island

Two Shoreline Access Bills Signed Into Law this Week

SIGNED INTO LAW!

MY BILL TO PUT
GUARDRAILS AROUND
ATTEMPTS TO REDUCE OR
RESTRICT PARKING NEAR
CRMC RIGHTS OF WAY HAS
PASSED THE RI SENATE!

- REQUIRES PUBLIC
COMMENT PERIOD,
SUBMITTING PLAN TO
CRMC & DEM
- REVIEW OF ADA
ACCESSIBILITY



GET MONTHLY UPDATES AT
[VICTORIA4RI.COM/NEWSLETTER](https://victoria4ri.com/newsletter)

VICTORIA
GU

State Senate
District 38

Many people volunteered to work on and testify for these shoreline access bills, and we're making progress! We will be discussing these bills and getting ideas for future bills at our July 7th 6pm town hall!



Monthly Commuter Rail Working Group Meetings

Next meeting scheduled for: Monday July 14th, 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>

Last Day of Legislative Session

On the last night of legislative session, we went from 2pm to almost 2am! Luckily we had some Del's and some Diet Coke to keep us alert.



Reflecting on Successes & Challenges with Future Caucus

After a busy legislative session, it's time to debrief and reflect.

At **Future Caucus**, Millennial and Gen-Z lawmakers are sharing recent successes and challenges in their states. At a time of increasing polarization, many have formed bipartisan caucuses in their states to focus on policies that unite us- rather than what divides us.

Senator Tiara Mack and I also caught up with our Congressmembers Seth Magaziner and Gabe Amo to talk about what's happening in Congress and how that's affecting Rhode Islanders

Celebrating Juneteenth at Wilcox Park

Thanks to the organizers of the Juneteenth celebration in Westerly for putting together such a joyful and powerful event!

Juneteenth celebrates the end of slavery in the U.S. and has deep roots here in Rhode Island, where communities have long marked the day with pride, music, food, and reflection.

In 2023, we made Juneteenth an official state holiday—an important step in honoring Black history and resilience.

Grateful to celebrate freedom and community with everyone today!



Solidarity with Butler Hospital Nurses, Staff

Over the weekend, I joined Chairman Lou DiPalma and fellow senators to stand in solidarity with the nurses, clinicians, and staff at Butler Hospital who are on strike. Butler Hospital is Rhode Island's only nonprofit psychiatric hospital, providing critical mental health and substance use care to patients from across our state. The

people delivering that care deserve fair wages, safe staffing, and dignity on the job. Let's keep pushing for a healthcare system that values its workforce as much as its patients.

The Future of Coastal Trades & Aquaculture

At “*Coastal Resilience & the Future of Coastal Trades*,” hosted at the Westerly Education Center, Rhode Island workers, industry leaders, and community members came together to share firsthand experiences and explore strategies for adapting to the growing challenges of climate change.

Matt Behan of **Behan Family Farms** in Charlestown shared how **warming waters and harmful algal blooms**—like a rust tide that killed over a million oysters overnight—are threatening aquaculture in **Ninigret Pond**, where shallow depths and high summer temperatures reduce oxygen levels and stress shellfish so they're more vulnerable to disease.

To adapt, Behan is working with **Roger Williams University** on rust tide research and participating in a **Real Jobs RI exchange program** to strengthen the aquaculture workforce and promote industry resilience.



The event also featured a keynote by Janet Coit, former NOAA Fisheries Director, and a panel of RI coastal professionals discussing the challenges of recycling/disposing of fishing nets and adaptations that businesses along Atlantic Avenue are using in advance of storm season, when nor-easters / hurricanes can cause a lot of damage.



Celebrating 50 years of the Jonnycake Center of Westerly

Celebrating 50 years of the **Jonnycake Center of Westerly**—a true lifeline for families across South County.

From stocking shelves as a teen to now supporting their food pantry through Senate grants, I'm proud to stand with this incredible team. Grateful to Executive Director Lee Eastbourne, staff, board & volunteers for all you do 🧡

Here's to the next 50 years of helping neighbors find stability, support, and dignity.



What's RI Doing About Climate Change? Presentation at

Ocean Community Collaborative

Thank you to the Ocean Community Collaborative for inviting me to speak about RI's actions in response to climate change. We had a productive discussion on the impacts of climate change right here in South County — and the legislative solutions we're pursuing to protect our communities, coastlines, and future. These challenges are urgent, especially for our coastal towns. It was a great audience and many people posed thoughtful questions. We don't have a recording, but the slides are posted at <https://victoria4ri.com/climate-change-town-hall/>



Ready to Level Up Your Career?

The Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training offers **free or low-cost training and apprenticeship programs** designed to help you build the skills employers need, in sectors like the building trades, manufacturing, teaching, entrepreneurship, and more. Whether you're just starting out or ready to advance, there's a path for you.

- ✓ **Online & In-Person Training Options**
- ✓ **Apprenticeship Programs** for hands-on learning
- ✓ **Real Jobs Rhode Island** connects you to high-demand industries with training in technical skills, career readiness, and more.

Learn more and search through their programs here <https://dlt.ri.gov/free-or-reduced-cost-training-programs>