
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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2023 Session Begins

The 2023 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly began on Tuesday afternoon January 3, 2023. Newly elected officeholders were sworn in and the Senate President and House Speaker gave speeches outlining their respective priorities. A separate inauguration ceremony was held earlier that day in the Rhode Island Convention Center for the five state-wide elected officials.

The Rhode Island Senate plans to only meet once a week at the beginning of session as Senators work to get bills introduced. The House of Representatives will meet twice a week at the beginning of session, before moving to three days/week once Committees are formed and bill hearings begin.

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2022 Election Results

The 2022 electoral season yielded new faces in statewide offices and in the General Assembly, though the overall political environment has not changed substantially. Our federal delegation changed when Representative James Langevin chose not to run for re-election. In one of the most closely watched races this past November, Seth Magaziner beat Allan Fung and now represents Rhode Island's 2nd Congressional District. Three statewide officeholders handily won re-election. Governor Daniel McKee, Lieutenant Governor Sabina Matos, and Attorney General Peter Neronha all won the election. There were two open races to statewide office. James Diossa was elected as our new General Treasurer and our new Secretary of State is Gregg Amore. All five statewide officeholders and all four federal officeholders are Democrats.

The General Assembly has a number of new faces, but overall, the balance of power between Republicans and Democrats did not change. There were 5 Republican Senators out of 38 members last year, and that number remains the same this term. In the House, the Republican caucus actually shrunk from ten to nine, with one Independent (Jon Brien) pledging to caucus with the Democrats.

General Assembly Lists

To view a list of Senators and Representatives which includes email and phone contact information, [click here](#).

Senate Leadership Set

When former Senate Majority Leader Michael McCaffrey decided not to run for re-election, it opened up leadership positions within the Rhode Island Senate. After the November election, the Senate Democrats met and voted for Senator Ryan Pearson (Cumberland, Lincoln) to be the new Senate Majority Leader. The former Republican Senate Minority Leader Dennis Algieri also did not seek re-election last year. The Senate Republican Caucus met and elected Senator Jessica de la Cruz (Burrillville, Glocester, North Smithfield) to be the new Senate Minority Leader.

Once the session began, the Senate voted to re-elect Senator Dominick Ruggerio (Providence, North Providence) to be Senate President. All Senators voted to support him other than Senator Bell. Senator Maryellen Goodwin (Providence) remains Senate Whip and Senator Hanna Gallo (Cranston, West Warwick) remains Senate President Pro Tempore.

Four new Senate committee chairs were established at the beginning of the session. Senator Pearson vacated the Senate Finance Committee chair and was replaced by Senator Lou DiPalma (Middletown, Little Compton, Tiverton, Newport). Senator DiPalma had been the Senate Rules, Ethics and Government Oversight Committee Chair, the new Chair is Senator Mark McKenney (Warwick). Former Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Cindy Coyne did not run for re-election, the new Chair is Senator Dawn Euer (Jamestown, Newport). Senator Euer had chaired the Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee, the new Chair is Senator Alana DiMario (North Kingstown, Narragansett, Block Island).

State of the State

Governor Daniel McKee is scheduled to address a joint session of the Rhode Island House of Representatives and the Rhode Island Senate on Tuesday, January 17, 2023. The annual Gubernatorial State of the State Address will be televised. This talk is the opportunity for the Governor to establish legislative and budget priorities for the upcoming session. The Governor's budget proposal is due to be introduced as a House bill by the end of the week.

Bill Introductions

State Worker Abortion Coverage

([H 5006](#), Kazarian, House Judiciary)

This bill provides for abortion coverage in the Medicaid program and repeals the abortion coverage exclusion for state employee insurance plans.

School Committee Meeting Agenda - Discussion Items

([H 5022](#), Edwards, House State Government & Elections)

This bill would allow school committees to add item(s) not appearing in the published notice to their agendas for the purposes of discussion only if the revised agenda is filed with the Secretary of State and posted on the district website at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the meeting.

State Employee COLA Restoration - Retired as of July 1, 2022

([H 5038](#), Bennett, House Finance)

This bill would restore the cost of living allowance (COLA) to state employees, and/or their beneficiaries, who retired prior to July 1, 2012

Post Retirement Employment - Higher Education - \$25,000

([H 5039](#), Hagan McEntee, House Finance)

This bill would increase the maximum post retirement employment earnings from eighteen thousand dollars (\$18,000) to twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) a year for certain retired educators employed by public higher education institutions.

Teacher Post-Retirement Employment - 120 Days

([H 5040](#), O'Brien, House Finance)

This bill would permit retired teachers to substitute teach in a school for up to one hundred twenty (120) days in a school year, without any loss, forfeiture, or reduction in retirement benefits. This extended time period would be from the effective date of passage of this act until June 30, 2025.

Adjunct Faculty Medical Insurance

([H 5043](#), Hull, House Finance)

This bill would provide that adjunct faculty members at any state college or university who teach at least fifty percent (50%) of the hours regularly worked by full-time faculty in an academic semester would be eligible for the same state hospital care and surgical-medical service benefit as other state employees.

Student Transportation - 2 mile Radius

([H 5082](#), Lombardi, House Education)

This bill would require school committees to provide transportation for any student who resides two (2) or more miles from school.

Computer Science Curriculum Standards

([H 5083](#), Lombardi, House Education)

This bill would direct the council on elementary and secondary education to develop recommendations for a high school curriculum to prepare students for successful postsecondary education and careers in computer science. The bill would also direct the commissioner of elementary and secondary education to consider the council's recommendations and develop academic standards for a computer science high school curriculum.

An Act To Education – K-2 Class Size Cap

([H 5085](#), Craven, House Education)

This bill would mandate that public-school classroom size be limited to twenty (20) students for kindergarten through grade two (2) on or before October 1 of each school year. Exceptions would be made for emergencies, for temporary situations not to exceed three (3) days and for mid-year enrollments when it would be impractical to assign the student to any class except for an existing class of maximum size. This bill would take effect upon passage.

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