

## **Rhode Island American Physical Therapists Association (RIAPTA) Rhode Island 2024 Legislative Final Report**

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### *General Assembly 2024 Session Summary*

The 2024 Rhode Island General Assembly session ended in the early morning hours of June 14 (1:30 AM). The legislative introductions totaled 2536 individual bills, the most important being the budget bill for the Fiscal Year 2025. It was signed by Governor McKee on June 17th, and allotted \$13.96 billion for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2024. Each respective chamber staked out its policy priorities early on. Speaker Shekarchi again focused on the housing crisis the state is facing and rolled out a number of legislative initiatives to provide regulatory reforms in an effort to spur investment in affordable housing. Senate President Ruggerio rallied his leadership team around the issue of healthcare reform. He introduced a package of 27 bills and labeled it the Holistic Enhancement and Access Legislation for Total Health (HEALTH) Initiative.

Below are other notable legislative highlights from the 2024 session:

### **Housing**

Speaker of the House, Joe Shekarchi continued his efforts to address the state's housing crisis by introducing some bills that did not pass last session and adding a few more that attempted to make it easier to develop affordable housing. The package of bills introduced focused on amending and streamlining local zoning and construction regulations to promote more residential development in cities and towns.

A priority bill and a repeat from last year, allowed for the construction of Accessory Dwelling Units (aka "Granny Flats") in designated residential areas. The bill was reworked this session to address concerns and passed into law giving municipalities the ability to allow and regulate the proposed structures. Overall, 13 of the 15 bills introduced as part of the Speaker's housing bill package passed into law this session.

The FY25 budget also includes a housing bond of \$120M, allocating \$80 million for affordable housing, and \$40 million for various acquisition, homeownership, infrastructure, and revitalization programs. The bond will go before the voters in November 2024.

## **Healthcare**

Under the leadership of Senate President Dominick Ruggerio, the Senate launched its HEALTH Initiative, a multiple bill legislative package aimed at improving health care access and affordability in Rhode Island. The initiative focused on four key pillars: consumer protection, provider availability and care quality, cost containment, and health system financial stability. The bills that were signed into law by the Governor include; a number of provider compact bills that allow health care providers licensed in other compact participating states to deliver services in Rhode Island; creation of a state fund to assist citizens burdened by medical debt, prohibition of medical debt being reported to credit bureaus and requiring dental insurance companies to report on dental loss ratios.

Another law that passed was the Healthcare Provider Shield Act, which provides legal protections for healthcare providers of women's reproductive care and trans health services. The bill protects the health care community from hostile out-of-state laws that could negatively impact delivery of care.

## **Environment**

Several bills regarding the environment were also passed by the general assembly. Capturing the momentum from last year's coastline access law, a new law requires sellers of oceanfront properties within the state to inform and educate prospective buyers on shoreline access rights that may be applicable to the property for sale.

"The Energy Storage Systems Act" was also passed by the General Assembly, which requires the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank and the Office of Energy Resources to design programs to meet energy storage capacity benchmarks in anticipation for Rhode Island's transition to renewable energy.

Additionally, the consumer products PFAS (forever chemicals) ban bill passed, which comes after years of gradual limitations of PFAS in packaging and water. The full ban of PFAS for select consumer products is scheduled to be enacted by 2027.

## **Business**

A large variety of bills focusing on various sections of business practice were introduced this session. A few of the notable bills that received the Governor's signature included:

- **Bank taxation** - allows financial institutions such as Citizens Bank and others to elect a single sales factor apportionment methodology for calculating corporate income tax, creating parity between Rhode Island and other states.
- **Rhode Island Data Transparency and Privacy Protection Act** - Online service providers and commercial websites that control or process personal data of not less than 35,000 customers or at least 10,000 customers and derive more than 20% of gross revenue from the sale of personal data are now subject to additional disclosure requirements and must allow customers the right to opt out of the collection of personally identifiable information.
- **Paid Family Leave Act** - the new law gradually increases family leave to 8 weeks. Originally proposed as an increase of 12 weeks, doubling the length of family leave, it was amended to just a 2 week increase. The increase will be phased in over a two year period with one additional week in 2025 (7 weeks), then to the maximum of 8 weeks in 2026.

## **Public Safety**

One of the higher profile bills of the 2024 session was the reforming of the Law Enforcement Officer's Bill of Rights. After several years of study, debate and bill introductions this General Assembly agreed on some key measures that will bring greater transparency and accountability

to law enforcement misconduct. The bill became law on June 12th and will provide increased public awareness and police transparency in reporting on police misconduct cases.

Other key public safety laws passed during the 2024 session included:

- DUI look-back increased from five to ten years. Under the new law drivers arrested for operating a vehicle under the influence will have their record reviewed over the last ten years to allow the judge to render increased sentencing for repeat offenses.
- Safe gun storage - Signed by Governor McKee on June 13th, enforces harsher civil penalties for unsafe/insecure gun storage, and provides stricter penalties for when guns are left in places that children or other people barred from possessing weapons can access them.

### **2024 Legislative Summary – Rhode Island American Physical Therapists Association (RIAPTA)**

This report will serve as a final report on legislative activity this year.

After meeting with the RIAPTA Government Affairs committee during the non-legislative months, the Mayforth Group worked with the committee chairperson, Greg Doucette, to determine a list of priority bills that would be part of the RIAPTA legislative package for the 2024 General Assembly session. The Mayforth Group set forth a list of bills that consisted of the following; co-pay parity in-line with primary care, physical therapist interstate license compact; and PT graduate privileges allowed after license test failure. All three were bills that had been introduced in previous sessions and had had varying levels of success in passing the House or Senate but never making the final step to the Governor's desk to be signed into law.

Given the support and a strong sponsor in the House, the physical therapist interstate license compact was the priority legislative initiative for the RIAPTA in 2024. The House bill was heard early in the session and passed the full House in early May. The Senate followed by taking up both the House and Senate versions and moved them out of committee on the same day. The Mayforth Group worked with RIAPTA Government Affairs committee members to

ensure that both written and oral testimony in support of the bills was submitted to the respective committees. Both bills passed into law on June 25<sup>th</sup>, adding Rhode Island to the list of states that recognizes its licensed physical therapists in other participating states.

Co-pay parity legislation for PT services has been a perennial issue since the Mayforth Group has represented RIAPTA. The challenge in advocating for this proposal is that a number of other medical service providers propose the same legislation requiring a reduction in co-payments to be on par with primary care services. This volume of requests for reducing co-payments unfortunately plays into the hands of the insurers' argument that the adoption of such a policy for all providers will increase premiums. Despite the evidence that physical therapy can help to rehabilitate post-surgery to prevent re-admissions or alleviate symptoms of chronic pain, PT gets grouped in with other providers when insurers make their arguments in opposition. As a result, the insurance industry once again prevailed in keeping the bills from being enacted into law.

For the third year, RIAPTA introduced legislation to allow PT graduates to continue to provide PT services under the guidance of a licensed PT even if they were not successful in passing the required state license exam. The original proposal put forth that if the graduates were not successful after two attempts to pass the exam, their practice privileges would be revoked. This proposal was modeled after a similar regulation in Massachusetts allowing a graduate to take the exam multiple times without revoking privileges. The bills were introduced in the format that had passed out of the House last year. This language allowed for the number of unsuccessful exam attempts to just one failure, and added a sunset date to the privilege extension. RIAPTA understood the concerns expressed by some legislators last year in the number of failures allowed (2) but expressed concerns that it did not address the competitive disadvantage it puts Rhode Island PT practices in when competing with Massachusetts for new physical therapists. Each bill received a favorable hearing in committee but neither received a vote to move beyond the hearing stage of the legislative process.

Throughout the session the member participation of the RIAPTA Government Affairs committee was overwhelming in response to the Mayforth Group's requests for written and oral testimony at committee bill hearings. This effort is vitally important in the process in order to advocate on

behalf of RIAPTA legislative priorities. The Mayforth Group gratefully appreciates the time and commitment members have put forth in this effort to be heard.

If you have any questions regarding any of these measures (the full list of bills tracked can be found below), please don't hesitate to contact us. We at the Mayforth Group thank you for a productive legislative session and look forward to continuing this valuable partnership as we collaboratively work to ensure RIAPTA and its members are included in current and future legislative or regulatory initiatives.

Below is a list of some of the significant bills of interest for RIAPTA that the Mayforth Group tracked throughout this legislative session:

### **Senate Bills**

Senate Bill No. [2876](#)

Chapter 273

**BY** Gallo, DiPalma, Gu, Ciccone

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- RHODE ISLAND PHYSICAL THERAPIST LICENSURE COMPACT ACT (Allows the state to become a member of the physical therapist licensure compact adopted by twenty-five (25) states in order to facilitate the interstate practice of physical therapy with the goal of improving public access to physical therapy service)

{LC4679/1}

03/22/2024 Introduced, referred to Senate Health and Human Services

04/19/2024 [Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration](#) (04/25/2024)

04/25/2024 Committee recommended measure be held for further study

06/07/2024 [Scheduled for consideration](#) (06/10/2024)

06/10/2024 Committee recommends passage

06/11/2024 [Placed on Senate Calendar](#) (06/13/2024)

06/13/2024 Senate read and passed

06/13/2024 [Placed on House Calendar](#) (06/13/2024)

06/13/2024 House passed in concurrence

06/21/2024 Transmitted to Governor

06/25/2024 Signed by Governor

Senate Bill No. [2718](#)

**BY** LaMountain, Pearson

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- PHYSICAL THERAPISTS (Amends the licensing statute to allow a graduate of a board approved physical

therapy school to be reinstated upon a failed examination upon the filing and registering for a second or third examination.)

{LC5528/1}

03/05/2024 Introduced, referred to Senate Health and Human Services

03/15/2024 [Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration](#) (03/21/2024)

03/21/2024 Committee recommended measure be held for further study

Senate Bill No. [2403](#)

**BY** Ujifusa, DiMario, Lauria, Valverde, DiPalma, Murray, Mack, Lawson, Sosnowski, Ciccone  
**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO INSURANCE -- ACCIDENT AND SICKNESS  
INSURANCE POLICIES -- PHYSICAL THERAPY COPAY (Limits copays, coinsurance or  
office deductibles for services of a physical therapist to the amount authorized for the services of  
a primary care physician or osteopath on or after January 1, 2025.)

{LC4782/1}

02/12/2024 Introduced, referred to Senate Health and Human Services

03/29/2024 [Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration](#) (04/04/2024)

04/04/2024 Committee recommended measure be held for further study

## House Bills

House Bill No. [7213](#)

Chapter 272

**BY** McGaw, Potter, Cortvriend, Boylan, Handy, Ajello, Cotter, Speakman, Kazarian, Kislak  
**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- RHODE ISLAND  
PHYSICAL THERAPIST LICENSURE COMPACT ACT (Allows the state to become a member  
of the physical therapist licensure compact adopted by twenty-five (25) states in order to  
facilitate the interstate practice of physical therapy with the goal of improving public access  
to physical therapy services.)

{LC3592/1}

01/18/2024 Introduced, referred to House Corporations

01/26/2024 [Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration](#) (01/30/2024)

01/30/2024 Committee recommended measure be held for further study

04/26/2024 [Scheduled for consideration](#) (05/02/2024)

05/02/2024 Committee recommends passage

05/03/2024 [Placed on House Calendar](#) (05/07/2024)

05/07/2024 House read and passed

05/13/2024 Referred to Senate Health and Human Services

06/07/2024 [Scheduled for consideration](#) (06/10/2024)

06/10/2024 Committee recommends passage in concurrence

06/13/2024 [Placed on the Senate Consent Calendar](#) (06/13/2024)

06/14/2024 Senate passed in concurrence

06/21/2024 Transmitted to Governor

06/25/2024 Signed by Governor

House Bill No. [7265](#)

**BY** Potter, McGaw, Cruz, McNamara

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS -- PHYSICAL THERAPISTS (Amends the licensing statute to allow a graduate of a board approved physical therapy school to be reinstated upon a failed examination upon the filing and registering for a second examination.)

{LC4474/1}

01/24/2024 Introduced, referred to House Corporations

01/26/2024 [Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration](#) (01/30/2024)

01/30/2024 Committee recommended measure be held for further study

House Bill No. [7151](#)

**BY** Bennett, Edwards, Ackerman, Giraldo, Ajello, Shallcross Smith, Morales, McNamara, Handy, Serpa

**ENTITLED**, AN ACT RELATING TO INSURANCE -- ACCIDENT AND SICKNESS INSURANCE POLICIES -- PHYSICAL THERAPY COPAY (Limits copays, coinsurance or office deductibles for services of a physical therapist to the amount authorized for the services of a primary care physician or osteopath on or after January 1, 2025.)

{LC3421/1}

01/11/2024 Introduced, referred to House Health & Human Services

02/09/2024 Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration

02/12/2024 [Meeting postponed](#) (02/13/2024)

02/12/2024 [Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration](#) (02/15/2024)

02/15/2024 Committee recommended measure be held for further study