

## March 2015 RI Legislative Update

As we move into March activity in the General Assembly is starting to move briskly. After a slow start to this session – partially as a result of the change in administration and the corresponding “feeling out period” there have been a number of bills introduced – particular over the past two weeks as the official bill submission deadline has passed. Many of the bills are directly related to commitments made during the last November election where leadership stood firmly on their position to reduce unemployment and improve the state’s business climate.

We have seen several bills calling for tax revisions – particularly regarding the minimum corporate tax; licensing regulation review, and other incentives to add jobs. Unfortunately, along with these has been a strong commitment and corresponding bills to raise the minimum wage. The governor as well as the House Speaker and Senate President have gone on record supporting this and several bills have been presented. The one with the most support calls for a raise from \$9 to \$10.10 effective Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> of 2016. These rates are similar to those already in place in Connecticut and Massachusetts based on legislation passed last year. During these hearings there was both strong support and equally strong opposition to these increases. Those in favor of this state that Rhode Island needs to remain competitive with its neighboring states. The opposition, including this Association has taken the position that this is not a viable approach as no study has been done to determine the impact of this raise – not to mention that RI is not in the same economic condition as its’ neighbors – not to mention that the cost of living is not the same.

Among other bills being considered are those that have been continually introduced over the past several years. These include a proposed plastic bag ban, several SNAP/EBT fraud reduction initiatives, a number of GMO labeling bills, eVerification, and various tobacco sale restrictions.

The Plastic Bag ban bill had a hearing a few weeks ago and was held for further study. The SNAP/EBT bills and GMO legislation is scheduled to have hearings this week. For more detail on these please check out our published bill recaps and the RIFDA Watch List which lists bills we are following.

As always, if your company has strong views on any of this legislation – pro or con please make your opinion know by contacting your State Representative or Senator and by submitting letters of support or opposition to the committee the particular bill has been assigned to. If you need help or recommendations on how to do this please do not hesitate to contact us. Remember that the State Representatives and Senators are there to represent their constituents and have a vested interest in supporting the views of their voters.