



The Shekarchi Report

Representative Joe Shekarchi

Dear Neighbors,

It is a tremendous honor to serve as your State Representative and I am truly humbled by your support. As you may know, my House colleagues elected me Speaker in January. I continue to work with them along with all Warwick and state officials on a positive agenda to help us recover from the pandemic and build a brighter future for our city and our state.

I am writing to share with you some of the accomplishments of a very busy legislative session. I am so proud that we took strong action to address pressing issues in housing, education, the environment, health care, child protection, pay equity and improving the quality of life for seniors and working families. I am committed to always protecting the best interests of Warwick's taxpayers.

Should you wish to discuss your ideas or any concerns, please call me at 401-639-9950 or email me at rep-shekarchi@rilegislature.gov.

Joe Shekarchi

Strong Action to Protect Our Environment

Warwick has 39 miles of coastline, making our community particularly susceptible to the impact of sea rise and climate change. As we've seen in areas like Buttonwoods, Nausauket and City Park, rising water levels and increasingly intense storm surges regularly damage homes, businesses and infrastructure.

I am very proud that we passed the Act on Climate this year, one of the most influential environmental bills approved by the legislature in decades. It addresses climate change and ensures that our state is prepared for an economy that is shifting to adapt to clean technology.



Speaker Joe Shekarchi speaking at the signing of Act on Climate, a landmark environmental protection law

Major Steps Taken to Address Housing Crisis

When I became Speaker, I pledged to make housing my top priority, and I'm very pleased this has been a productive legislative session for housing issues. We:

- *Established the state's first permanent funding stream for affordable housing to help address Rhode Island's critical housing shortage;*
- *Passed a new law to prohibit housing discrimination against those who receive government assistance to pay their rent;*
- *Launched a five-year pilot program to create supportive housing for 125 chronically homeless Rhode Islanders; and*
- *Created the position of "housing czar" to oversee housing initiatives and develop housing plans for the state.*



At the United Way, Speaker Shekarchi touts a new law prohibiting housing discrimination

The leadership of Rhode Island Housing, in an opinion piece in the Providence Journal, wrote: "Thanks to a comprehensive package of budget investments and legislation, a strong foundation has now been laid to make real progress towards providing all our residents with the housing options they need to safely and affordably house their families and thrive economically."

There's still much more work to be done, but we've already made great progress.

Budget Phases Out Car Tax, Invests in Recovery

I am immensely proud of the two budgets we passed this year, which addressed the most important needs in our state while making no broad-based tax increases. We preserved and strengthened services that help the most vulnerable, while making investments to aid in the economic recovery for the business community.

The budgets continued the phase-out of the car tax, and after next year's budget is enacted, the car tax will be completely eliminated for all Rhode Islanders. The budget also paid back all of the funding borrowed from the state's rainy day fund early in the pandemic. We included \$10 million above the Governor's request for the Department of Children Youth and Families to hire more than 90 new workers to address ongoing issues.

I'd rather use a federal dollar instead of a state dollar anywhere I can, and we did just that: we leveraged

available federal funding to stretch our investments in areas like infrastructure and education even further.



Speaker Joe Shekarchi is joined at the Warwick Rotary Club by, from left, John Howell, Warwick Beacon publisher; Janet Stevenson, Warwick Public Library director; Steven Hinger, Warwick Rotary Club president; and Lara D'Antuono, Boys & Girls Club of Warwick executive director

Making Key Investments in Higher Education



Speaker Joe Shekarchi speaks at CCRI-Warwick at a celebration marking the now-permanent College Promise program

One of the best investments we can make to help people achieve their goals is to give them access to a college education, which is the pathway to a brighter future.

This year, we permanently enacted the Rhode Island Promise program, which provides up to two years of free tuition for income eligible in-state students at Community College of Rhode Island. More than 800 Warwick students have benefitted from the Promise program since its launch three years ago.

We also funded an additional \$5.9 million beyond the Governor's budget request to assist Rhode Island College. Earlier this year, voters approved bond issues we placed on the ballot that included funding for a fine arts center at URI, a science building at RIC and renovations to CCRI's campuses.



Governor McKee signs the College Promise law, sponsored by Joe Shekarchi

Strengthening Care, Services for Seniors



Speaker Shekarchi with former AARP Rhode Island Director Kathy Connell

Rhode Island's nursing home residents deserve the best care and our nursing home staff deserve the supports they need to make this happen. *We enacted legislation to strengthen staffing standards and funding for direct care staff to improve the quality of care for the vulnerable and elderly*, who were particularly at risk during the COVID crisis. We committed more than \$21 million to assist in this effort.

We also passed a law to assure that families of nursing home residents can be visited by family members or caregivers even during declared emergencies.

To address those that prey upon the elderly, we adopted a new law requiring financial institutions to report suspected exploitation of seniors.

The state budget included robust funding for the Pilgrim Senior Center to continue vital services for Warwick seniors.

Expanding Health Coverage, Lowering Drug Costs

As leaders, we continuously strive to address the rising costs of health care and prescription drugs. *This year, we passed a law to require health insurers to cover colorectal cancer screenings, which is truly life-saving preventative care.* This is in addition to my legislation enacted a few years ago which requires insurers to cover all costs related to mastectomies.

Regarding prescription drugs, we required pharmacists to provide information to consumers about less expensive prescription options which may be available to them, and we made certain that insured patients *can no longer be charged more than \$40 per month for insulin used to treat diabetes.*

Warwick: A Great Place To Live and Work

I am one of many people who have lived in Warwick my entire life. I love our beautiful beaches and parks, and fantastic restaurants and shops. Warwick is a community where working families can afford to buy a good home, send their children to quality schools and access employment.

Warwick received \$40.2 million in education aid in the current state budget, up from \$38.7 million in 2020, enabling local property taxes to remain stable. This year's state budget includes \$13 million in tax relief for Warwick vehicle owners.

As we look to invest the influx of federal funding coming to our state, I pledge to continue working closely with my colleagues in state and city government to ensure an even brighter future for our great city.

Representative Joe Shekarchi
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Speaker Shekarchi honors Bishop Hendricken students for winning the RI Academic Decathlon competition



Joe Shekarchi presents 50 bicycle helmets to fourth-grade students at Robertson School in Warwick, in conjunction with the RI Association of Justice



Addressing participants at a rally, Speaker Joe Shekarchi gives assurances that all funding and services will continue unchanged for blind and visually impaired students statewide



Speaker Shekarchi is pleased the McDermott Pool has been renovated and has reopened for year-round use