New prescribed food insurance law will allow affordable treatment for rare diseases

State House – Legislation requiring insurance coverage for special baby formula and prescribed food is now law.

The new measure, which is now in effect, abolishes the mandated cap on coverage for those suffering from rare diseases and inherited disorders requiring prescribed nutrition mandates. The bills (2014-S 2505A, 2014-H 7903), sponsored by Sen. Ryan W. Pearson [D-Dist. 19, Cumberland, Lincoln] and Rep. Raymond A. Hull [D-Dist. 6, Providence, North Providence], induced passionate testimony from patients and family members of patients who require prescribed diets and formulas during the hearing process.

Senator Pearson said he had introduced the bill because the family of a constituent suffering from a rare disease called phenylketonuria (PKU) asked him for help. PKU is a birth defect that causes an amino acid called phenylalanine to build up in the body. Too much phenylalanine can cause a variety of health problems, and babies, children and adults with PKU need to follow a strict diet that limits this type of protein building block.

Newborns suffering from PKU need special formula that can cost around $1,000 per month, placing a heavy burden on middle class and low-income families. The number of people suffering from PKU in the state is an estimated 40 individuals, but the struggle over cost of care has not been overlooked. The legislation could also be beneficial to much larger populations afflicted with Crohn’s disease, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), and more prevalent conditions that may call for unusual dietary restrictions.

Electric vehicle license plates will protect first responders

Providence – Gov. Lincoln D. Chafee signed a bill into law that requires owners of hybrid and electric-powered vehicles to obtain special license plates so that first responders and emergency crew members don’t accidentally electrocute themselves while using jaws of life to extricate passengers from wreckage.

The legislation allows first responders to determine what instrument is appropriate to use for the rescue of those trapped inside electric vehicles quickly simply by looking at the license plate.