

Rhode Island may shed requirement that film, TV productions shoot mostly in-state to get tax credits

Patrick Anderson | January 27, 2020



The crew of the Black Duck takes a break before unloading booze from a boat in "The Bootlegger," a film shot in Newport in November. Cast members in this scene, from left, Wesley O'Dell, Connor Holden, Will O'Connor, Forest Quaglia and Amadeus Finlay. [Patricia Cahill Taft]

The prospect of a large, high-profile movie or television show being shot in Rhode Island is spurring a fast-track bid to loosen restrictions on the state's \$20-million annual film tax-credit incentives.

Steven Feinberg, executive director of the state Film and Television Office, confirmed Monday that Rhode Island is close to landing a big production that's inspiring the legislation, although he declined to reveal what marquee names are behind it.

He said the scale of the production is significant enough to make tweaks to the motion-picture incentive program worthwhile.

"I think people will be excited when we finally show what we are working on to bring here," Feinberg told The Journal on Monday. "It is a high-profile production that Rhode Island residents will be very proud of."

Legislation introduced last week by House Finance Committee Marvin Abney, D-Newport, would allow large projects spending at

least \$10 million in Rhode Island to get a waiver from the rule requiring that more than half of a production be shot in state.

House Speaker Nicholas Mattiello and Majority Leader K. Joseph Shekarchi are co-sponsors of the bill, which is the sole item on the agenda of the House Finance Committee hearing Tuesday. A Senate version of the bill is expected soon, said Greg Pare, spokesman for Senate President Dominick Ruggerio.

"This legislation would provide some flexibility to allow a production to come to Rhode Island that intends to spend a substantial amount of money in our state, but might not have the ability to film 51% of the production in Rhode Island," Feinberg said. "We want to have the ability to bring a production that would be prominent and have a very positive impact on tourism while having a positive impact on local [film] crew base."

The state's incentive program provides tax credits worth up to 30% of the expenses a film or television production spends in the state.

The program this year is capped at \$20 million in tax credits — an increase of \$5 million from last year — and that limit would hold if the new bill passes.

Although he wouldn't divulge whether it is a film or television series, horror, drama, comedy or superhero saga, Feinberg confirmed the target production is looking primarily at Newport with other parts of the state also likely to host filming from time to time.

The Film and Television Office, which oversees the film tax-credit program, would be responsible for signing off on waivers to the 51% in-state production requirement if the bill passes.

"This is why the motion picture tax incentive came to fruition; this is exactly the type of production I had always hoped we could bring to Rhode Island, and am very excited," Feinberg said.

Other big productions that have filmed include television series "Body of Proof," movies "The Bootlegger" and "Underdog" and television series "NOS4A2," which Feinberg said finished filming its second season last week. ■