



Memo To: RI House Labor Committee  
From: Kelly Nevins, CEO, Women's Fund of Rhode Island  
Date: March 15, 2021  
Re: Support for HB5852, HB5853 and HB5854

---

The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research grant making and strategic partnerships designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change.

**The Women's Fund supports passage for House Bill 5852, 5853 and 5854.**

We know from both our local research and widely available national research that sexual harassment is a form of gender-based oppression that has long term psychological and economic impacts for individuals and the broader community. When there are few safeguards in place to deter sexual harassment (and other forms of discrimination based on gender, race or other protected classes) that hold those who cause harm accountable, abuses of power can go unchecked.

House Bill 5852 will allow workers to hold liable individuals as well as employers for illegal employment activities, including discrimination based on race, gender and sexual orientation. As the law is currently written, workers who are subjected to discrimination have no way to hold individuals liable for discrimination or sexual harassment in the workplace. House Bill 5852 would allow for personal liability for and accountability of perpetrators of discrimination; this will serve as a deterrent for this type of discrimination in the workplace.

House Bill 5853 will allow workers to retain rights as it relates to discrimination and illegal employment practices. As the law is currently written, as a condition of employment, employers may require prospective employees to sign away rights to publicly discuss alleged violations of civil rights or criminal conduct in the workplace, including sexual harassment. Silencing women is a tactic that has long been used to perpetuate problems of sexual harassment in the workplace. This bill would ensure workers retain the right to speak about alleged civil rights violations in the workplace.

House Bill 5854 expands protection from discrimination to contract employees and other gig workers, and workers of companies with fewer than four employees. As we have seen in the last year, women have been particularly impacted by the economic challenges from the onset of the pandemic. The gig economy is a critical way many Rhode Islanders are making ends meet. We need to expand protections of these workers as much as possible to ensure they do not suffer discrimination or sexual harassment.

Women's Fund of Rhode Island urges ***passage of these bills to ensure safeguards against discrimination for the women of Rhode Island.***