



March 17, 2021

The Honorable Anastasia Williams, Chair
Rhode Island Labor Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02903

RE: Opposition to HB 5854

Dear Chair Williams:

Internet Association's mission is to foster innovation, promote economic growth, and empower people through the free and open internet. The internet creates unprecedented benefits for society, and as the voice of the world's leading internet companies, we ensure stakeholders understand these benefits.

Internet Association (IA) represents a diverse group of internet companies that are committed to using technology and innovation to spur local economies, provide needed food, supplies, and transportation for essential workers and other residents, and ensure the safety of those on the front lines. IA respectfully opposes **HB 5854** that would broaden the definition of "employee" for purposes of the fair employment practices to include "gig workers" to prevent discrimination in the workplace. While the intent of this legislation is laudable, IA has significant concerns with the attempt to reclassify independent contractors in Rhode Island as employees, if only for purposes of preventing discrimination in the workplace.

Applying a definition of employee to independent contractors in only one narrow section of law and not uniformly will lead to confusion regarding employment status among workers and the businesses that utilize them. Further, certain segments of the gig economy (transportation network companies) are already subject to stringent fair employment practices in existing law.¹ A piecemeal approach to resolving issues that affect gig workers invites scrutiny as to the State's interest in worker classification as a whole that is playing out on a national level and with little uniformity.

The issues surrounding worker classification, unionization, and the increased protection of a growing new workforce are much bigger and more complicated than those addressed within **HB 5854**. IA strongly recommends the Rhode Island State Legislature convene a state taskforce similar to those proposed or already formed in other states to examine the gig economy,

¹ <http://webserver.rilegislature.gov/Statutes/TITLE39/39-14.2/39-14.2-21.HTM>



independent contractors, and the concerns from the labor community regarding worker protections.

Proposals involving worker reclassification, collective or sectoral bargaining, portable benefits and other potential safety net systems, and the overall future of the workforce in Rhode Island should be given careful consideration together and with stakeholder input at every level.

For these reasons and more, Internet Association strongly encourages you to hold **HB 5854** in committee for further study. I welcome any questions you may have regarding IA's position on this bill and can be reached at olsen@internetassociation.org or 518-242-7828.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Olsen', written in a cursive style.

John Olsen
Director, State Government Affairs Northeast Region