



RHODE ISLAND WORKING FAMILIES PARTY

Representative Anastasia Williams, Chair

House Committee on Labor

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Support for H-5855, Relating to The Rhode Island Whistle Blowers' Protection Act

Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee,

It is imperative for a healthy and functioning economy that every employee be empowered to report issues in the workplace and to participate in the follow-up investigation and, as necessary, litigation. This is especially critical where wage theft, harassment, fraud, and health and safety is concerned. Employees who are confident that they are protected from retaliation by their employer and report violations ultimately (a) benefit the labor force by creating a safer workplace, (b) benefit responsible business owners who adhere to laws and regulations, and (c) benefit consumers since violations of worker health and safety often impact consumers as well.

H-5855 amends The Rhode Island Whistleblower's Protection Act to post notices regarding the law in prominent locations in all languages known to be spoken by employees, and extends protections to applicants and prospective employees. The bill's changes provide further self-protection mechanisms to employees whose language differs from the employer's. The bill also protects workers who may need to switch employers as work opportunities fluctuate in response to the employer winning/losing work which is out of the employees' control. Additionally, H-5855 protects workers and applicants from employers reporting or threatening to report an employee's immigration status to law enforcement in retaliation; this provides an additional protection to those who would otherwise be bullied into silence. Most significantly, H-5855 revises damages from actual to treble, providing a strong disincentive for employers to retaliate against employees.

The Rhode Island Whistleblower's Protection Act must be applicable to and protective of *all* workers. It must provide pathways for workers to hold employers accountable for violations of the laws and regulations that protect all workers' safety. Empowering all workers to speak up without fear of retaliation protects all of us.

Respectfully submitted,

Adam Gutta

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Member, RI Working Families Party