



Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander Caucus

2023 - 2024 Legislative Report

LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Dear Friends / Amigos,

As we present our second annual legislative report, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to each of you who have tirelessly advocated for Rhode Island's Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander communities. Your unwavering dedication and hard work have been instrumental in driving our progress, and we deeply appreciate your commitment.

This past year has been marked by significant achievements that reflect our collective efforts to create a more equitable Rhode Island. As we conclude this legislative session, we reflect on the significant strides made for equity and justice. While four bills from our policy agenda have become law, including those related to rent increases, minimum wage for domestic workers, temporary caregiver insurance, and legal protections for healthcare providers, we acknowledge that some critical bills are still pending including raising taxes on high-income earners, reforming the use of solitary confinement, passing the Crown Act, expanding support and access to bilingual education, and more.

Although the Support and Access for Bilingual Education Act did not pass, we are pleased to report that Senator Cano and Representative Felix secured increased funding for multilingual learners in the state budget. This funding will now be included in the education funding formula, making it automatic and more predictable.

The Caucus remains steadfast in its commitment to addressing disparities and uplifting our communities. Our progress is a testament to our collective resilience and dedication. Notably, the Caucus is now the largest in its history, with 21 members—14 in the House and 7 in the Senate—representing roughly 18% of each chamber. Moving forward, we will continue to advocate for policies that foster inclusivity and opportunity, building a more equitable future for all Rhode Islanders.

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to our intern, Yajaira Herrera, a student at Boston University, for her dedicated efforts in preparing this report.

To the public, we thank you for your tireless work and steadfast advocacy. Your passion and commitment are the driving forces behind the change we seek, and we are honored to stand alongside you in this important work.

In Community,



Senator Acosta



Representative Felix

Co-Chairs, RIBLIA Caucus

INTRODUCTION

The Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander Caucus (“RIBLIA” or the Caucus) represents and advocates for the interests of disadvantaged people throughout the State of Rhode Island. Their mission is to increase diverse participation and representation at all levels of government.

In 2023, RIBLIA underwent a transformative evolution, transitioning to a co-chaired structure with representation from each chamber in the General Assembly. The Caucus, chaired by Senator Jonathon Acosta (D-Dist. 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) and Representative Leonela Felix (D-Dist. 61, Pawtucket), embraced a new name, RIBLIA, that reflects Rhode Island’s growing racial diversity and commitment to rectifying disparities within its community.

In 2024, RIBLIA released its 2024 legislative policy agenda. The agenda focused on critical issues such as housing and homelessness, supports for communities and small businesses, supports for all students, civil rights and public safety, health and wellness reform, equity and culture. Their advocacy aims to create a more equitable and inclusive future for all Rhode Islanders.

RIBLIA carefully selects bills for their legislative policy agenda driven by their commitment to uplifting marginalized communities and promoting equity. Bills are proposed by members of the Caucus and put through robust discussions, considering diverse perspectives and community needs. After these discussions, the bills are brought to a group vote before becoming a part of the Caucus’s policy agenda. Unanimity is not a requirement for a bill to be added to the policy agenda; it simply requires a majority vote. Through this thorough approach, RIBLIA ensures that their legislative priorities are representative and impactful.

This report outlines the bills endorsed by the Caucus in the 2024 legislative session, organized into six categories, aiming to narrow and ultimately eliminate inequalities, in all aspects of life, between white Rhode Islanders and the state’s communities of color. Additionally, this report presents the legislative accomplishments of the Caucus for the 2024 legislative session (bills that successfully passed in both chambers). At the end, we present a table indicating whether a bill was held for further study in committee, whether a floor vote was taken, and if it passed or failed during the House or Senate floor vote.

RIBLIA CAUCUS MEMBERS



Sen. Jonathon Acosta
Co-Chair



Rep. Leonela Felix
Co-Chair



Rep. Marvin L.
Abney



Rep. Grace
Diaz



Rep. Karen
Alzate



Rep. Raymond A.
Hull



Rep. David
Morales



Sen. Ana B.
Quezada



Rep. Joshua
Giraldo



Sen. Tiara T.
Mack



Rep. Jose F.
Batista



Sen. Sandra
Cano



Sen. Robert
Britto



Rep. Brianna E.
Henries



Rep. Cherie L.
Cruz



Rep. Enrique
Sanchez



Sen. Linda L.
Ujifusa



Rep. Jennifer
Stewart



Sen. Victoria
Gu



Rep. Nathan W.
Biah



Rep. Ramon A.
Perez

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Rhode Island lawmakers seek to remove barriers to fair and affordable housing, ensuring equitable access for all residents. Aiming to enhance tenants' rights and housing stability, these bills seek to strike a balance between tenants' rights and landlords' interests promoting fair and transparent practices in the rental market.

RENT INCREASE NOTICE EXTENSION

H-7304 and S-2189

SECURITY DEPOSIT IN INTEREST BEARING ACCOUNT

H-7746 and S-2824

COUNSEL ACCESS IN EVICTION CASES

H-7962 and S-2417

AMENDS HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS

H-7967 and S-2764

FIRST TIME HOME BUYER ASSISTANCE

H-7776 and S-2555

SUPPORTS FOR COMMUNITIES AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Rhode Island needs a fair tax system to fund essential public services like healthcare, education, public transportation, and affordable childcare. Supporting domestic workers, especially working-class women of color, with a right to the state's minimum wage is also crucial for economic mobility. These bills aim to address financial needs, promote progressive taxation, and ensure revenue is directed to vital services.

HIGH-INCOME EARNER CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC SERVICES

H-7338 and S-2355

ALLOWS DOMESTIC WORKERS TO EARN MINIMUM WAGE

H-7532 and S-2021

TEMPORARY DISABILITY INSURANCE PROVISIONS

H-7171 and S-2121

RIPTA FUNDING THROUGH SURCHARGE OF TRANSPORTATION APPS

H-7678 and S-2169

CHILDCARE SUBSIDY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

H-7124 and S-2847

PAYDAY LENDING INTEREST REGULATION

H-7211 and S-2141

SUPPORTS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Aiming to create a more equitable education environment for all students and empowering marginalized communities, the bills in this section allocate funds to benefit students' academic success in Rhode Island.

FREE NUTRITION ACCESS FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS

H-7400 and S-2320

SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION

H-7514 and S-2917

STATE FUNDING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

H-7397 and S-2866

EQUITY AND CULTURE

Promoting fairness and inclusivity, this act addresses racial equity by prohibiting discrimination based on race, including but not limited to hair texture and protective hairstyles. It aims to combat hair-based discrimination which perpetuates systemic racism.

PROHIBITS DISCRIMINATION BASED ON HAIR TEXTURE AND PROTECTIVE STYLES

H-7724 and S-2195

CIVIL RIGHTS AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Rhode Island is dedicated to safeguarding the civil rights and liberties of all its residents while enhancing public safety. This set of bills focuses on refining legal definitions and clarifications within the state's legislative framework. Specifically, the bills redefine terms such as "felony" and "misdemeanor," adjust maximum prison sentences, and address conflicts with federal immigration law. These changes aim to promote consistency, fairness, and clarity in the legal system, improving public understanding. Additionally, two of these bills focus on protecting and supporting libraries to ensure they can fulfill their mission with appropriate funding and without censorship.

CRIMINAL OFFENSE CLASSIFICATION CLARIFICATION

H-7527 and S-2100

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT REFORM AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

H-7637 and S-2462

ELECTION AND VOTING AMENDMENT

H-7474 and S-2779

STATE AID FOR LIBRARIES

H-7335 and S-2281

PROTECTS LIBRARIES FROM BOOK BANS AND CENSORSHIP

H-7386 and S-2281

FELONY EXPUNGEMENT

H-7164 and S-2677

HEALTH AND WELLNESS REFORM

Rhode Island is committed to public health and the advocacy of equitable healthcare policies. These bills aim to protect patients from high prescription drug prices and shield healthcare providers from legal actions related to transgender and reproductive health care, ensuring they can focus on delivering patient care.

PRESCRIPTION INHALER PRICE CAP

H-7153 and S-2069

SHIELD ABORTION PROVIDER PROTECTION

H-7577 and S-2262

MEDICARE ADVANTAGE RESOLUTION

H-7887 and S-2402

LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During the 2023-2024 session, the General Assembly accomplished several significant legislative victories that greatly benefit the BIPOC community. These achievements varied from allowing domestic workers to earn minimum wage to creating a protective legal shield for healthcare providers from legal action related to transgender and reproductive healthcare services.

Rent Increase Notice Extension

2024 S-2189 Mack / 2024 H-7304 Stewart

Requires that landlords of residential properties give tenants notice of rent increases at least 90 days prior to increase and requires notice requirement for rent increases for month-to-month tenants who are over the age of 62 years, to 120 days

Allows Domestic Workers to Earn Minimum Wage

2024 S-2021 Euer / 2024 H-7532 Felix

Allows individuals employed in domestic service or in or about a private home to be included as an employee, for purposes of minimum wages law.

Temporary Disability Insurance Provisions

2024 S-2121 Lawson / 2024 H-7171 Giraldo

Increases the maximum temporary caregiver benefit weeks from six (6) to eight (8) weeks over a period of two years and raises the dependency allowance.

Shield Abortion Provider Protection

2024 S-2262 Euer / 2024 H-7577 Edwards

Creates a protective legal shield for healthcare providers, precluding any civil/criminal action by other states/persons against providers involving persons seeking access to transgender and reproductive healthcare services provided in RI.



Gov. Dan McKee announced that he signed three bills into law that support reproductive health care and the LGBTQ+ community in Rhode Island. NBC 10 News

LEGISLATIVE BILL STATUS OVERVIEW

This table provides a status update on all of RIBLIA’s legislative priorities, including the corresponding bill numbers. It indicates whether each bill was held for further study in committee, whether a floor vote was taken, and if it passed or failed during the House or Senate floor vote.

I = Introduced, no committee hearing
F =Failed Floor Vote

HFSS = Held for Further Study
P = Passed Floor Vote

Bill Name	House Bill Number and Status	Senate Bill Number and Status
Rent Increase Notice Extension	H-7304: P	S-2189: P
Security Deposit In Interest Bearing Account	H-7746: HFSS	S-2824: HFSS
Counsel Access In Eviction Cases	H-7962: HFSS	S-2417: HFSS
Amends Homeless Bill Of Right	H-7967: HFSS	S-2764: HFSS
First Time Home Buyer Assistance	H-7776: HFSS	S-2555: HFSS
High-income Earner Contribution To Public Services	H-7338: HFSS	S-2355: HFSS
Allows Domestic Workers To Earn Minimum Wage	H-7532:P	S-2021: P
Temporary Disability Insurance Provisions	H-7171: P	S-2121: P
RIPTA Funding Through Surcharge of Transportation Apps	H-7678: HFSS	S-2169: HFSS
Childcare Subsidy Assistance Program	H-7124: HFSS	H-7124: HFSS
Payday Lending Interest Regulation	H-7211: HFSS	S-2141: HFSS
Free Nutrition Access For Elementary And Secondary Students	H-7400: HFSS	S-2320: HFSS
Support and Access For Bilingual Education Act	H-7514: HFSS	S-2917: HFSS
State Funding For Mental Health Services	H-7397: HFSS	S-2866: I
Criminal Offense Classification Clarification	H-7527: HFSS	S-2100: P

Solitary Confinement Reform And Human Rights Protection	H-7637: HFFS	S-2462: I
Election And Voting Amendment	H-7474: HFFS	S-2779: HFFS
State Aid For Libraries	H-7335: HFFS	S-2281: P
Protects Libraries from Book Bans and Censorship	H-7386: HFFS	S-2281: P
Felony Expungement	H-7164: HFFS	S-2677: HFFS
Prescription Inhaler Price Cap	H-7153: HFFS	S-2069: HFFS
Shield Abortion Provider Protection	H-7577: P	S-2262: P
Medicare Advantage Resolution	H-7887: HFFS	S-2402: HFFS
Prohibits Discrimination Based On Hair Texture and Protective Styles	H-7724: P	S-2195: HFFS

STANDING TOGETHER / UNIDOS

Sen. Cano and Rep. Felix help secure increased school funding for multilingual learners in the state budget.

Senator Cano and Representative Felix cosponsored a bill prioritized by the Caucus, the Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act (H-7514 and S-2917). This bill would have created a dual language program within the Rhode Island Department of Education, providing grants to schools to establish dual language programs. Although the Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act did not pass, the FY2025 budget did change how funding for multilingual learners works. Representative Felix and Senator Cano's advocacy made this funding more automatic and predictable by incorporating funds directly into the education funding formula and providing a twenty-five percent (25%) student success factor.

Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBoR) Reform

During this legislative session, the General Assembly addressed the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBoR) to improve transparency and accountability in police misconduct cases. The key changes included expanding hearing panels, allowing police chiefs to publicly comment on disciplinary actions, releasing video evidence related to misconduct cases, and extending the suspension period for officers without pay.

RIBLIA took a critical stance on LEOBoR reform, arguing that the changes did not go far enough, particularly in addressing police accountability in cases involving inappropriate use of deadly force. Before the reform bill passed, RIBLIA announced four key priorities for the Caucus to support the legislation, which included:

- **Annual Public Reporting:** Establishing an annual public reporting provision to enhance transparency in LEOBoR cases and outcomes.
- **Full Removal of the Gag Order:** Fully removing the gag order to allow both departmental leadership and accused officers to speak openly about allegations of misconduct.
- **Increasing Summary Suspension to 14 Days Without Pay:** Extending the period of summary suspensions from 2 days to 14 days without pay before a LEOBoR hearing can be requested.
- **Clear Language Mandating Concurrent LEOBoR and Criminal Proceedings:** Ensuring that disciplinary actions could proceed concurrently with criminal trials.

While the reform bill addressed the first three priorities, it failed to include the fourth, which would have permitted the discipline or termination of officers for egregious misconduct, regardless of criminal trial outcomes. RIBLIA argued that without a provision allowing police chiefs to immediately terminate officers who use deadly force in violation of departmental policies, the reform is insufficient. As it stands, such officers can remain employed and receive benefits until their criminal trial concludes, which RIBLIA believes undermines accountability.

To strengthen the proposal, RIBLIA members introduced an amendment to empower police chiefs to take immediate disciplinary action, including termination, in cases where deadly force is used in violation of department policies. However, the amendment was ultimately defeated, leading many RIBLIA members and allies to vote against the bill. This marked the first time the Caucus united in solidarity on a critical issue.

To read a detailed explanation of these priorities, click [here](#).

LOOKING AHEAD / PA'LANTE

As we conclude this legislative session, we reflect on the significant strides made toward equity and justice for all Rhode Islanders. This session, four bills from our policy agenda have become law. These new laws included a requirement for landlords to give tenants at least 90 days' notice for rent increases (120 days for tenants over 62 years old), ensure domestic workers earn Rhode Island's minimum wage, an extension of temporary caregiver insurance from six to eight weeks over a two-year period, and legal protections for healthcare providers offering transgender and reproductive services. Although the Support and Access for Bilingual Education Act did not pass, Senator Cano and Representative Felix helped secure increased funding for multilingual learners in the state budget, which will now be included in the education funding formula, making it automatic and more predictable.

While these measures represent significant progress, it is important to acknowledge that several bills from both the 2023 and 2024 policy agendas are still needed and awaiting action. These include the High-Income Earner Contribution to Public Services, the Solitary Confinement Reform and Human Rights Protection Act, the Criminal Offense Classification Clarification Act, the Support and Access for Bilingual Education Act, the Free Nutrition Access for Elementary and Secondary Students Act, and the Crown Act, which prohibits discrimination based on hair texture and protective styles.

We expect to take up the aforementioned priorities in the next session and look forward to making Rhode Island a more welcoming and supportive home for all its residents.