



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

2022-2023 Legislative Report

LETTER FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Friends,

As we prepare our annual legislative report, we want to take a moment to extend our deepest gratitude to each and every one of you who for many years have tirelessly advocated to uplift and improve the lives of Rhode Island's Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander communities. Your unwavering dedication and commitment to this cause have not gone unnoticed, and we owe so much of our progress to your hard work.

The past years brought unprecedented challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to heartbreaking incidents of violence against Black Americans at the hands of the police. These challenges underscore the urgency of our work and the importance of your support.

Legislative work is often a complex and demanding endeavor, filled with obstacles that can sometimes seem insurmountable. Yet, it is your voices, your stories, and your tireless advocacy that continue to drive us forward. Your dedication inspires us to push for change, to fight for justice, and to work tirelessly to create a more fair, equitable, and inclusive Rhode Island for all.

As we reflect on the progress we've made and the work that still lies ahead, let us also remember the resilience of our communities. We are stronger together, and it is through our collective efforts that we will continue to make strides toward a brighter and more equitable future for all Rhode Islanders.

On behalf of the Caucus, thanks to each of you for your tireless work and unwavering advocacy. Your passion, dedication, and unwavering commitment are the driving forces behind the change we seek, and we are honored to stand alongside you in this important work.

Lastly, we extend our profound appreciation to Judge Diony Garcia for his invaluable assistance in the updating of our bylaws. Additionally, we would like to express our gratitude to our intern, Dylan Murray, for their dedicated efforts and diligent research in preparing this report.



Senator Acosta
Co-Chair



Representative Felix
Co-Chair

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American, and Pacific Islander Caucus (the “RIBLIA” or Caucus) underwent a transformative evolution, transitioning to a co-chairship leadership structure with Senator Jonathon Acosta (District 16, Central Falls, Pawtucket) and Representative Leonela “Leo” Felix (District 61, Pawtucket) assuming leadership roles, succeeding the outgoing Chairwoman Representative Karen Alzate (District 60, Central Falls, Pawtucket). Alongside this significant shift, the Caucus embraced a new name, one that embodies the rich tapestry of diversity within Rhode Island.

The sweeping changes in leadership not only ushered in innovative strategies, but also marked a pivotal moment in the Caucus's history, characterized by significant legislative achievements. The decision to alter the name underscored a shared acknowledgment of Rhode Island's growing racial diversity and the enduring disparities within its communities. Drawing inspiration from the trailblazing efforts of Civil Rights activists, the Caucus committed itself wholeheartedly to rectifying these imbalances through the influential tool of legislative action.

This comprehensive report meticulously details the legislative initiatives championed or endorsed by the Caucus in 2022-2023, thoughtfully organized into seven key categories, all with the overarching goal of addressing inequality through legislative action. Additionally, it presents the legislative accomplishments of the Caucus for the 2021-2022 legislative session. The bills that successfully passed in both sessions stand as a resounding testament to the Caucus's potential and serve as an enduring source of inspiration for future members.

RHODE ISLAND, BLACK, LATINO, INDIGENOUS, ASIAN-AMERICAN, AND PACIFIC ISLANDER CAUCUS



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

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Safe, affordable, and stable housing is a pressing need for Rhode Islanders. High housing costs create barriers, risking displacement for many. Even those with housing face eviction challenges due to limited legal help. Members of the General Assembly are working on bills to ban rental application fees, define rights for tenants and landlords, and establish a landlord registry. These initiatives aim to stabilize occupancy rates, providing benefits for both tenants and landlords alike.

PROHIBITION ON RENTAL APPLICATION FEES

H-6087 & S-0311A

RENTAL REGISTRY

H-5225 & S-0315

TENANT BILL OF RIGHTS

H-6062 & S-0911

SUPPORTS FOR COMMUNITIES AND SMALL BUSINESSES

Rhode Island needs a fair tax system on the wealthy to support workers and small businesses. This will strengthen small businesses, improve municipal projects, raise wages for tipped workers, and boost minority and women-owned businesses. In summary, these bills aim to uplift low-income workers and empower small business owners in the state.

REVENUE FOR RHODE ISLAND

H-6148 & S-0232

MINORITY AND WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESS ENTERPRISE INCLUSION

H-5748 & S-0144

MINIMUM WAGE FAIRNESS FOR TIPPED WORKERS

H-5590 & S-0000

MINORITY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE EMPOWERMENT IN SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

H-5793 & S-0237

TIP PROTECTION

H-7510 & S-2246

LET RI VOTE ACT

H-7100 & S-2007

SUPPORTS FOR ALL STUDENTS

For years, our state's municipalities have distributed funds unevenly to students in state schools. In 2011, the General Assembly introduced a per-pupil spending formula for fairness. The bills in this section allocate funds to benefit students in Rhode Island.

FREE NUTRITION ACCESS FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS
H-5639 & S-0068

SUPPORT AND ACTION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION
H-5777 & S-0549

TRAUMA INFORMED SCHOOLS ACT
H-6667 & S-2556

REQUIRES ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE AT LEAST ONE UNIT OF INSTRUCTION ON ASIAN AMERICAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER HISTORY AND CULTURE.
H-7272 & S-2910

ALLOWS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS RECEIVING STATE SILVER/GOLD SEAL OF BILITERACY TO EARN COLLEGE CREDIT TOWARD MINOR/MAJOR IN LANGUAGE AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITY/COMMUNITY.
H-7607 & S-2953

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice issues directly affect all area residents and are of utmost importance. Although these problems, like air pollution, disproportionately harm minorities, addressing them is vital for the well-being of the entire community. This section contains an amendment prohibiting the construction and operation of high-heat waste facilities. These facilities do not generate renewable energy and pose health risks due to the production of toxic pollutants.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FROM HIGH HEAT PLASTIC CONVERSION FACILITIES
H-5142 & S-0131

CIVIL RIGHTS AND PUBLIC SAFETY

This set of legislation amends the General Law to two ends. Two of the bills relate explicitly to limiting the usage of punitive measures, specifically in criminal settings. One relates to discriminatory policies prohibiting the wearing of various Afro-texture hairstyles in the workplace. Ambiguity in rules allows their agents and interpreters free agency to rule discriminately against persons of color. Taken together, these bills provide far more specific guidelines for these agents, limiting their ability to discriminate against minority groups, and thus the ability of their respective institutions to discriminate at a more systematic level. With these bills, the Caucus protects Rhode Islanders of color from being arbitrarily discriminated against by them.

THE RHODE ISLAND CANNABIS ACT

H-7593 & S-2430

CRIMINAL OFFENSE CLASSIFICATION CLARIFICATION

H-5361 & S-0685

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT REFORM AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

H-6161 & S-0617

PROHIBITS DISCRIMINATION BASED ON HAIR TEXTURE AND PROTECTIVE STYLES.

H-5924

DRIVER'S LICENSE PRIVILEGE CARDS AND PERMITS FOR UNDOCUMENTED COMMUNITY

H-7939 & S-2006

INCREASES THE AGE FROM 18 TO 21 YEARS FOR LAWFUL SALE OF FIREARMS OR AMMUNITION.

H-7457 & S-2637

PROHIBITS THE OPEN CARRY OF SHOTGUNS AND RIFLES.

H-7358 & S-2825

BAN ON LARGE CAPACITY MAGAZINE.

H-6614 & S-2653

AUTOMATIC SEALING OF RECORDS OF PERSONS ACQUITTED OR OTHERWISE EXONERATED.

H-7354 & S-2945

HEALTH AND WELLNESS REFORM

Recognizing the significant health disparities faced by BIPOC communities, addressing health and wellness reform is a pressing imperative. These bills prioritize equitable access to healthcare and support for vulnerable populations, particularly BIPOC communities, aiming to bridge the existing disparities by removing barriers and exploring more effective state healthcare options.

EQUALITY IN ABORTION COVERAGE ACT

H-5006 & S-0032

ENSURING SPECIALTY DRUG AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

H-5350 & S-0871

MEDICAID MANAGED CARE OVERSIGHT AND TRANSPARENCY

H-5474 & S-0109

EQUITY AND CULTURE

These bills are distinct in their focus on making equity a core value for Rhode Island. While other legislation addresses immediate concerns, these bills aim to establish a sustained commitment to equity. The first bill designates Juneteenth as a state holiday, signaling Rhode Island's dedication to this value. The second mandates budget oversight to ensure ongoing accountability in pursuing equity as an integral legislative goal.

ESTABLISH AS A STATE HOLIDAY, “JUNETEENTH NATIONAL FREEDOM DAY”

H-5380 & S-0444

EQUITY IMPACT ON BUDGET

H-6110 & S-0527

LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In the 2022-2023 session, the General Assembly achieved several groundbreaking legislative victories that significantly benefited the BIPOC community. These achievements ranged from enabling the issuance of driver's licenses to undocumented Rhode Islanders to instituting the automatic expungement of criminal records associated with cannabis offenses.

Equality in Abortion Coverage Act,

([2023-S 0032](#) Valverde / [2023-H 5006](#)

Kazarian), expands abortion access in Rhode Island by adding abortion coverage to our state's Medicaid program and eliminating bans on abortion coverage for state employees and their dependents.



Gov. McKee signs the Equality in Abortion Coverage Act into law, Thursday, May 18, 2023. (Twitter/GovDanMcKee)

Juneteenth National Freedom Day

([2023-H 5380A](#) Henries / [2023-S 0444A](#)

Mack), establishes Juneteenth as a state holiday in Rhode Island. Juneteenth celebrates the emancipation of African-American slaves in the United States, and has been lauded as a symbol of African-American civic freedom and social equality. Any state government which officially celebrates this holiday in doing so also commits itself to the realization of both values. The codification of this holiday in Rhode Island law officiates its position as a creator and protector of equity.



Gov. McKee signs bill establishing Juneteenth as a state holiday, Monday, June 19, 2023 (Newport Buzz)

Ensuring Specialty Drug Affordability and Accessibility, ([2023-H 5350A](#) Morales / [2023-S 0871A](#) Goodwin), limits the out-of-pocket expenses of specialty prescription drugs for insured people to \$150 per 30-day supply.

The Fair Limitation on Rental Application Fees ([2023 H-6087A](#) Cruz / [2023 S-0311A](#) Murray), prohibits landlords, rental agents and property managers from charging rental applications fees unless it's for (1) a credit check or (2) a criminal background check, unless the rental applicant has provided a credit report and BCI/police background check dated no more than 90 days before the day of the application. This law goes into effect on January 1, 2024.

The Rhode Island Cannabis Act, the legislation ([2022-S 2430Aaa](#) Miller / [2022-H 7593Aaa](#) Slater), decriminalizes the sale and possession of up to 1 ounce of cannabis for those age 21 and up, with no more than 10 ounces for personal use kept in a primary residence. It also allows Rhode Islanders to grow a small amount of their own cannabis at home. The legislation also provides for the automatic expungement of previous convictions for cannabis possession by July 1, 2024.

Safe Roads and Mandatory Insurance Act, ([2022-S 2006Aaa](#) Ciccone / [2022-H 7939A](#) Alzate), allows the Division of Motor Vehicles to issue driving privileges to undocumented residents in the state who meet certain criteria such as filing personal income tax returns as a Rhode Island resident for the tax year preceding the date of application.

Increases the age from 18 to 21 years for lawful sale of firearms or ammunition, ([2022-H 6614A](#) Tanzi / [2022-S 2653](#) Goodwin), prohibits the possession, sale or transfer of any feeding device capable of holding, or readily able to be extended to hold, more than 10 rounds of ammunition to be fed continuously into a semi-automatic firearm.

Prohibits the Open Carry Of Shotguns and Rifles, ([2022-S 2825](#) McCaffrey / [2022-H 7358A](#) Felix) makes the definitions of “rifle” and “shotgun” consistent with federal law, and prohibit the open carry of any loaded rifle or shotgun in public. A violation is punishable by imprisonment of up to five years or a fine up to \$5,000 or both.

Ban on Large Capacity Magazine, ([2022-H 6614A](#) Caldwell, [2022-S 2653](#) Coyne), prohibits the possession, sale or transfer of any feeding device capable of holding, or readily able to be extended to hold, more than 10 rounds of ammunition to be fed continuously into a semi-automatic firearm.

Automatic sealing of records of persons acquitted or otherwise exonerated, ([2022-H 7354 SUB A](#) Felix / [2022-S 2943 SUB A](#) McCaffrey), provides a procedure for the automatic sealing of records of persons acquitted or otherwise exonerated by operation of law or by motion.

The Trauma Informed Schools Act ([2022-H 6667B](#) Ranglin-Vassell / [2022-S 2556A](#) Cano), directs the commissioner of elementary and secondary education to establish a trauma-informed schools implementation plan to support to support the academic, behavioral, social and emotional needs of all students.

Requires all public schools to provide at least one unit of instruction on Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander History and culture, ([2022-S 2910A](#) Cano / [2022-H 7272A](#) Fenton-Fung), requires every public elementary and secondary school to include in its curriculum a unit of instruction studying the events of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AA and NHPI) history, including the history of AA and NHPIs in Rhode Island and the Northeast, as well as the contributions of AA and NHPIs toward advancing civil rights.

Biliteracy Seal, ([2022-H 7607](#) Morales / [2022-S 2953](#) Cano), allows high school students receiving state Silver/Gold Seal of Biliteracy to earn 2 to 4 semesters of college credit toward minor/major in language at public university or community college if requested within 3 years after high school graduation.

Tip Protection, ([2022-H 7510A](#) Morales, [2022-S 2246A](#) Kallman), forbids employers from receiving any portion of the tips given by customers to their tipped employees, with limited exceptions for credit card service charges on those tips.