



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

150 South Main Street • Providence, RI 02903
(401) 274-4400 • www.riag.ri.gov

Peter F. Neronha
Attorney General

April 9, 2026

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chairman
House Committee on Finance
State House, Room 35
Providence, RI 02903

Re: HJR 8207 Funding for the Commission on Prejudice and Bias

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Finance Committee,

I write today to express strong support for HJR 8207, which would appropriate \$100,000 for the Rhode Island Commission on Prejudice and Bias – funding that is critical to sustaining the Commission’s essential work preventing and responding to incidents of prejudice, bias, and hatred.

Established in 1981, the Commission was charged by the General Assembly with the critical responsibility of studying and reporting on all forms of prejudice, bias and hatred in our state. For more than four decades, the Commission has not only fulfilled this mandate, but expanded its work to meet evolving challenges - providing hate crime training to law enforcement agencies, organizing public education initiatives, advising policymakers, and serving as an accessible reporting resource for individuals and organizations across the state.

The Commission’s work has grown increasingly vital as incidents of hate and bias have risen nationally and regionally. In fact, recent reports from the United States Congress confirm that hate crimes across the country are on the rise.¹ The legislature’s original vision—that Rhode Island must actively monitor and respond to prejudice in all forms—remains as urgent today as it was in 1981. Sustained investment is essential to ensure the Commission can carry out the responsibilities entrusted to it and respond, meaningfully and effectively, to today’s climate of division, intolerance, and hate-fueled violence

The Commission is composed of seventeen members representing a broad range of professions, including three designees from my Office, and is supported by a part-time coordinator. It is uniquely structured to bring together legislators, law enforcement, community organizations, and individuals advocates, each contributing deep expertise in civil rights, policy, and advocacy. Collectively, the Commission reflects a collaborative- and multidisciplinary- approach to addressing bias and hate, and strengthening community trust.

¹ [Federal Data on Hate Crimes in the United States | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#)

Honorable Marvin L. Abney, Chairman
House Committee on Finance
April 9, 2026
Page 2

Among its many contributions, the Commission produces annual reports on the state of hate crimes and incidents in the state, helping policymakers and the public better understand the trends and respond appropriately to the needs of our residents. It also plays a central role in partnership with my Office to train law enforcement and community partners, ensuring responses to bias-motivated incidents and hate crimes are informed, culturally competent, and victim-centered. Its collaboration with the Municipal Police Training Academy and the Rhode Island State Police Academy has been particularly impactful in equipping officers with the necessary tools to serve Rhode Island's diverse population with fairness and respect.

Today, Rhode Islanders and community partners also rely on the Commission to address underreporting by ensuring that reporting is accessible to all, including non-English speakers. In furtherance of that mission, it has distributed thousands of informational materials—available in multiple languages—that explain what a hate crime is, how to file a report, and why reporting hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents matter.

Historically, the Commission's work has been supported through a combination of federal and state funding, including the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (JAG). However, the significant cuts to VOCA and JAG funding leave critical programs, including the hate crimes training program, without support. At this time, the only remaining funding for the Commission is \$18,000 from the Department of Administration for administrative expenses. Without this appropriation, the Commission's ability to continue its decades-long mission will be severely compromised.

For over forty years, the Rhode Island Commission on Prejudice and Bias has been a cornerstone of the state's commitment to equity, justice, and community safety. At a time of growing divisions in our community, Rhode Island cannot afford to lose one of its most important tools for prevention, education, and response. HJR 8207 represents a necessary, modest, and timely investment to ensure the Commission can continue its vital work protecting residents and supporting communities across the state. I respectfully urge the Committee to support and pass this legislation.

Sincerely,



Peter F. Neronha
Attorney General