

April 8, 2026

To: House Finance Committee

RE: Support for H8207– Appropriation for RI Commission on Prejudice & Bias

To the members of the committee,

I am here today to speak in favor of funding for the Rhode Island Commission on Prejudice and Bias. Organizations such as this are more necessary now than they have been in more than fifty years. I lived through integration in the rural south. I have not, since that time, seen the level of hostility toward minorities that I see throughout the country today. There is one thing that makes it worse now than it was then. At that time, we did not have a national administration that at best ignores, and at worst, encourages hostility toward people of color like we have today. There are far too many people now who have lost their inhibitions about expressing their disdain or outright hatred for non-whites in American society. I think that for number of closeted racists, their worst fears were realized when an African-American was elected for two terms as President of the United States. I also think that some simply resent references to “white privilege” because they think that it only applies to affluent whites. But “white privilege” is about much more than finances.

As a child in the rural south, I spent plenty of Saturdays in the nearest town with my mother while she did her shopping. Eventually, I was allowed to just walk around alone downtown during that time to other stores that sold toys. I almost never had money to buy anything, but I could browse. During all my wanderings in these stores I was only challenged once by an employee about what I was doing there. Otherwise, no one said anything to me. There is no doubt in my mind that it would have been a far different story if I had not been white. A nonwhite child alone, looking at toys, would have been asked every single time why they were there and where their parents were. On a day-to-day basis, white privilege is not defined by “bonuses” because of race. It is the things we can do without being eyed with suspicion, harassed or worse, falling victim to a hate crime. I think that is why so many of us fail to understand “white privilege”. We take it for granted.

In this climate, the potential for hate crimes against minorities is higher than it has been in decades – and it is NOT confined to the south. Organizations like this Commission are more essential now than they have been in half a century.

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