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I am writing to express my support of HB 7055/SB 2501 – Restoring the Right to Negotiate Longevity Payments.

I am an environmental engineer working for the Office of Utilities at the University of Rhode Island. In June I will reach my 13th year in public service with the State of Rhode Island--the first 7 in classified service for the Department of Environmental Management and Department of Health and the last 6 in nonclassified service at the University of Rhode Island. Prior to my years with the state, I worked for a private consulting firm, where after 6 years I pivoted to public service because I felt the work would be more meaningful. For the most part, it has been. But relative to career development, the decision to move to public service was a mistake. Why? Because when it comes to career development at the University of Rhode Island, there is little opportunity for those in nonclassified service.

Classified service, which is what most people think of when they think of state employees, refers to a structured personnel system within government (federal, state, or local) where positions are grouped into classes based on duties, responsibilities, and required qualifications. In Rhode Island, classified service falls under the state's Department of Administration. The classified system ensures consistent hiring, compensation, and promotion practices, with classified positions generally structured into a hierarchy based on complexity and required skill level. To illustrate, under the classified civil service structure, an engineer fresh out of college would enter state service as an Engineer I, eventually advancing through a series of grades (Engineer II, Engineer III, Engineer IV) as their levels of expertise and responsibility increase. Within each grade is a series of steps, which offer increasing salaries as the engineer increases their skill set within that grade. At times, the engineer advances when a higher-level grade opens and they can demonstrate they meet the requirements. Other times, engineers advance via a "desk audit" – a review process conducted by the Department of Administration when the engineer believes that they are working at a higher level of complexity and responsibility than would be expected for their current grade.

Nonclassified service positions – which fall under the University of Rhode Island's Board of Trustees -- are "terminal" positions. There is no step system, so the salary at hiring is the permanent salary. There is no advancement to a higher grade as one masters the complexity of their role. There are similarly named positions which would lead one to infer


that there is a career path, but this is not necessarily the case. For example, an engineer working as a Project Manager I assigned to one office might think that a Project Manager II position in another office represents a career path. However, job descriptions within the nonclassified service are fluid, and that Project Manager II position may perform a vastly different job requiring different credentials, technical background, and experience. Not only that, given the idiosyncrasies of the nonclassified salary structure, a Project Manager I may find that a Project Manager II role pays LESS than their current Project Manager I position. Thus, the Project Manager I finds no room for advancement and typically must leave the University to further their career and achieve a salary that better aligns with their level of expertise. How well does that outcome serve the University? Not well.

There is a misconception that the state saves money by denying longevity increases for its seasoned staff. But ultimately, it does not. The costs of lost productivity, lack of institutional knowledge, constituents frustrated with inefficient delivery of services, and so on, add up.

I ask that our leaders right this wrong. Reinstigate our right to negotiate longevity and give people a reason not to leave state service. By ensuring constituents have access to highest level of service thanks to an experienced workforce, everyone wins.

Sincerely,

Angela Harvey

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Angela Harvey', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.