

Ariana Costa

From: Rep. Stewart, Jennifer A.
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2026 3:43 PM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Cc: Rep. McEntee, Carol Hagan; Richard Sinapi
Subject: Support for H7352: THE RHODE ISLAND CIVIL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT ACT

Dear Chairperson McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

It is time for Rhode Island to make sure that everyday Rhode Islanders have a way to defend our civil rights and civil liberties when they are violated by our government. It is time for us to pass the Rhode Island Civil Rights Enforcement Act, H7352.

Following the Civil War, members of Congress realized that the legal rights of the people recently freed from enslavement would not be protected unless there was an enforcement mechanism, so they passed the Anti-KKK Act to protect Americans, especially Black Americans, from white supremacist violence and murder in the postbellum South and section 1 of that bill became 42 U.S.C. § 1983 – which empowers regular folks to sue state and local government officials who violate their federal constitutional rights. Section 1983 was later invoked by the plaintiffs in Brown v. Board of Education when they challenged school segregation 70 years ago.

Today we have an opportunity to pass a state level equivalent that would restore the rights of Rhode Islanders to sue for violations of our state constitutional rights. When our Rhode Island Supreme Court ruled that our rights enumerated in our state constitution are not “self-executing,” they negated the work of our legislature in enacting laws to protect Rhode Islanders.

If we fail to pass the Rhode Island Civil Rights Enforcement Act, H7352, then our state constitution is just a bunch of words on paper. Our Supreme Court has left it to the legislature to pass legislation outlining how our constitutional rights can be vindicated in the courts. This bill does exactly that. Let’s pass it.

The Rhode Island Civil Rights Enforcement Act, H7352, is especially crucial today, as we have watched masked federal ICE & CBP kill U.S. citizens like Renee Nicole Good and Alex Jeffrey Pretti and harm others in the streets. This bill would allow Rhode Islanders to sue federal agents for violating their state constitutional rights. With very limited remedies in federal court for federal agent violations of federal constitutional rights, this is extraordinarily important.

Moreover, this bill applies to government agents broadly, which means that it won't be struck down by the federal courts because it only applies to ICE agents as recently happened when U.S.

District Judge Christina Snyder in Los Angeles blocked the California bill banning ICE agents from wearing masks. This is the trouble with H7202, which allows suits against federal agents, but is susceptible to being struck down in federal court because it doesn't apply equally to all governments - state, local and federal.

Let's pass this bill to protect Rhode Islanders from and make the freedoms enumerated in our Rhode Island Constitution mean what they say.

Yours,

*Jennifer A. Stewart
Representative
House District 59
Pawtucket, RI
401-305-0088*