



## Director's Office

One Capitol Hill | Providence, RI 02908 | (401) 222-2280  
Jonathan Womer, Director

February 1, 2024

House Committee on Labor  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

### **Re: H 7106 – AN ACT RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS – LABOR RELATIONS ACT**

Dear Chairman Corvese,

Thank you and the House Committee on Labor for providing the Department of Administration (the Department) the opportunity to submit comments on H 7106, which proposes amendments to the Labor Relations Act.

The Department fully supports and endeavors to protect, at all times, the right to freedom of speech as provided by the Constitution. Concurrently, the Department must balance this support against a robust body of related case law, as well as a multitude of federal and state legislation and regulations in this area. As a result, the Department must navigate a complex, changing climate to protect free speech rights for our dedicated State employees.

Specifically, H 7106 raises concerns regarding the State's ability to comply with federal requirements limiting political activity in the government workplace. Additionally, R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-4-52 prohibits classified employees from engaging in partisan politics, other than voting, during work hours. The state, as an employer, has both the obligation to reasonably comply with such statutory and regulatory schemes and protect constitutional rights. The state has, and will continue to, balance these laws while acting in its capacity as an employer to manage its workforce according to other statutory and regulatory responsibilities and powers. Passage of this legislation may cause confusion as to what speech may be allowed in the workplace.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to share these concerns with the Committee. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact my office at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Womer", written over a horizontal line.

Jonathan Womer, Director of Administration



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cc: The Honorable Representative Robert Craven  
The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Labor  
James DeCastro, Committee Clerk  
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel, House Speaker's Office