

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE
RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

BILL NO.: 2024 H 7106
BILL TITLE: An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations –
Labor Relations Act
PRIMARY SPONSOR: Representative Craven
COMMITTEE: House Labor

*The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) **opposes** parts of this bill.*

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. Among the laws over which the Commission has jurisdiction are Title 28, Chapter 5 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, the Fair Employment Practices Act, which prohibits discrimination on a number of bases, including race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion.

H 7106 gives very strong protections for employees to speak on religious and political matters in the workplace. The Commission is concerned because the very expansive language is not consistent with the protections for religious accommodation provided in state and federal anti-discrimination law. In addition, the broad protection might cause an employer to decide against taking action when another employee raises concerns about employee political or religious speech that is hostile to them based on sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race or religion.

The Commission supports the section of the law that prohibits employers from mandating that employees listen to the employer’s communications on religion. While that would also be prohibited by state and federal anti-discrimination laws, this bill would establish a prominent notice to employers that such mandated meetings are unlawful.

For these reasons, the Commission urges that the Committee not pass this bill in its current form.

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