



# State of Rhode Island COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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## **WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

BILL NO.: 2024 H 7650  
BILL TITLE: An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations -- Fair Employment Practices -- Extreme Temperature Employee Protection  
PRIMARY SPONSOR: Representative Morales  
COMMITTEE: House Labor  
HEARING DATE: March 5, 2024  
PLACE: Room 135 – State House

***The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) requests amendments to this bill.***

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination against people who belong to protected categories—such as race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or age—in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodations and credit.

H7650 provides for employee protections in extreme temperatures. It defines extreme temperatures, outlines minimum protections for employees and employers’ responsibilities for providing those protections. The bill also delegates enforcement authority to the Commission for Human Rights.

The Commission supports the legislation’s goal of protecting employees from injuries because of extreme temperatures, especially in light of climate change leading to more extreme temperatures. Additionally, climate change has a disproportionate impact on Black and African American communities,<sup>1</sup> and Hispanic and Latinx people are more likely to hold jobs where they are impacted by extreme temperatures.<sup>2</sup> The Commission and its investigators’ expertise, however, is in investigating charges of unfair employment practices based on protected categories, not in workplace health and safety violations. Counsel for the Commission has spoken with the bill’s

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<sup>1</sup> Fears, Darryl and Grandoni, Dino, *Climate change will be a tougher burden for minorities in the US*, THE WASHINGTON POST, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2021/09/02/ida-climate-change/> (Sept. 2, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> *EPA Report Shows Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Socially Vulnerable Populations in the United States*, US EPA, <https://www.epa.gov/cira/social-vulnerability-report> (Sept. 2, 2021).

sponsor and a representative from the Teamsters, who collaborated on the legislation, to express this concern that the Commission is not the agency best equipped to enforce the provisions in this bill. While the Commission supports the legislation's goal, it requests the bill be amended to (1) place the provisions in a section of the Rhode Island General Laws concerning workplace health and safety and (2) delegate enforcement authority to an agency with expertise in that area.

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