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The Honorable Anastasia Williams  
House Labor Committee  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairwoman Williams and Committee Members:

The Northern RI Chamber of Commerce, would like to respectfully register its opposition to H6352, An Act Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Dignity At Work Act.

While well meaning, this legislation would place employers in an extremely difficult position and would result in many lawsuits. The definition of “workplace bullying” under this bill includes actions that “undermine” “humiliate” or “sabotage a person in the workplace.” It is characterized as taking the form of “interpersonal interactions” or “management actions” and even goes as far as to include “other types of objectionable behaviors.” These terms are very subjective. They can mean different things to different people, leaving everyone wondering what they can and cannot do or say in the workplace.

Page 4 of the bill talks about specific actions that are considered bullying: offensive language, interfering with a person’s personal property, overbearing or intimidating levels of supervision, withholding information, changing work arrangements to deliberately inconvenience someone, intruding on a person’s privacy by pestering, spreading misinformation, ignoring someone, reminding a person of past mistakes, gossiping... There is no way an employer can monitor all of these potential activities, and unfortunately many of these items cannot really be defined.

We can easily anticipate situations where two employees will accuse each other of bullying and both will be correct under this broad statute. Last year, a proponent of the bill testified that she and her co-workers were bullied by a supervisor. The woman seemed very genuine in her description of the hardships. However, at one point she made the comment that she and her colleagues discussed the person and the actions occurring and tried to take action. An attorney hired by the supervisor could argue under this bill that the group talking together constituted gossiping, withholding information and attempting to undermine his/her position which fits the definition of bullying under this legislation. We point this out only to make it clear that this

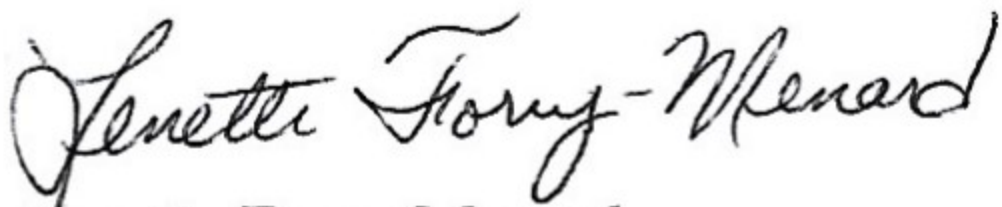


legislation is very encompassing, and would likely include every employee of a company at some time.

Lastly, what happens when a customer is the one bullying under this legislation – particularly given the broad definition of bullying? The employer cannot be everywhere at the same time. The employer cannot be firing individuals every day because a swear word is used or an employee moves another employee's coat to the coat rack.

We greatly appreciate the desire to encourage employment experiences that benefit employees and employers. However this expansive bill, the Chamber believes would have more harmful effects.

Respectfully,



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Legislative Lobbyist  
Northern RI Chamber of Commerce