

Testimony on H 5010—House Resolution Amending the Rules of the House of Representatives for the Years 2023 and 2024

Position: Support

Common Cause Rhode Island supports H 5010 which would put into the rules of the House a process for requesting equity impact statements to accompany legislation. As outlined in the resolution, these equity impact statements will assess whether legislation results in any change in equity for one or more of ten different categories, as listed in the resolution.

Common Cause Rhode Island believes that we must build equity into our public policy. For too long the General Assembly has passed legislation without any evidence about how that legislation will affect a variety of communities. Problems like mass incarceration and environmental racism are the result of a legislative process that has been conducted without information and thought about equity. While the General Assembly has made strides in rectifying historical inequities in these areas, the use of equity impact statements could help accelerate efforts to correct past inequities. Perhaps more importantly, using equity impact statements may very well prevent public policies whose true negative impacts won't be felt for decades.

Common Cause Rhode Island more broadly believes in an informed decision-making process where everyone has access to the information they need. This proposal will increase the kind, and amount, of information that is available to you as lawmakers. When you have more information about legislation you can make better arguments for and against the merits. When you have more information about the impact on equity of specific legislation you can better represent the needs and wishes of their constituents.

Because information is power, those with access to more information have historically held the power in Rhode Island. The result has been legislation that reflects the priorities of those in power. Equity impact statements give more information, and thus power, to rank-and-file legislators who can use it to make sure a more diverse set of voices are considered in the legislative process. You will be better Representatives if you adopt this change to the Rules of the House of Representatives.

The lack of information is particularly problematic for a part-time legislature like we have here in Rhode Island. With little individual staff it is up to you as lawmakers to do much research and policy evaluation yourselves. You're not expected to do your own fiscal analysis of legislation, why should you be required to do your own equity analysis?

Finally, this proposal comes in the form of an addition to the rules of the House of Representatives. We believe this is the appropriate place for this proposal. The rules are where you collectively as the House of Representatives allocate and delegate power, and determine how you will collectively conduct your

business. It is where you create the various caucuses that exist within the House, such as the Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus which plays a key role in this proposal.

Common Cause Rhode Island urges the House Committee on Rules to support H 5010 to establish a process for providing equity impact statements for legislation.

