

**Institute *for*
Responsive
Government
Action**

May 28, 2025

Re: Letter of Support for HB 16166 (Banning Sexual Harassment)

Dear Committee,

We are writing to express strong support for HB 6166, which would establish critical and long-overdue protections against sexual harassment within the Rhode Island General Assembly. This bill is a meaningful step toward ensuring that the people who serve, work, and participate in our democracy can do so in an environment free from harassment and fear of retaliation.

HB 6166 proposes a neutral, nonpolitical reporting and enforcement structure by engaging the Rhode Island Ethics Commission—an existing, independent body already entrusted with legislative oversight. By outsourcing enforcement to a neutral third party, the bill helps to avoid the inherent conflicts of interest that arise when investigations are handled internally within the legislature.

Importantly, HB 6166 codifies key components of the legislature's sexual harassment policy in statute, rather than relying on inconsistent chamber or caucus rules. This strengthens transparency, ensures continuity across legislative sessions, and reduces the risk of political interference in how complaints are handled.

The bill also takes meaningful steps to create a culture of prevention. It requires recurring, enforceable harassment training for *all* individuals who work in or interact with the State House—including legislators, staff, interns, volunteers, lobbyists, and pages. The Ethics Commission would also oversee this training, ensuring that it includes clear guidance on reporting mechanisms and third-party responsibilities.

A safe and respectful workplace should not be controversial—it should be the baseline. We urge you to support HB 6166 and help Rhode Island lead by example in building a government that is safe, professional, and accountable to the people it serves.

We strongly encourage the legislature to pass this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Tischenko
Senior Policy Advisor
Institute for Responsive Government Action