

## Testimony in Support of H 7236, The Equity Impact Assessment and Budget Equity Impact Act.

We support this legislation for two reasons. The first is that Common Cause Rhode Island believes that we must build equity into our public policy. Just as the General Assembly considers the fiscal impact of legislation, so too it should consider what impact, if any, legislation will have on communities that have historically suffered discrimination.

Additionally, we believe 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 lawmakers have available to them. As a lawmaker you can use this additional information to make better arguments for and against the merits of legislation. Given Rhode Island's diverse population, it also allows you to better represent the needs and wishes of your constituents.

Because information is power, those with access to the 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.

The current lack of information about the equity impact of legislation is particularly problematic for a part-time legislature like we have in Rhode Island. With little individual staff too often it is up to lawmakers to do research and policy evaluation themselves. Legislators with full-time jobs, families, and other obligations don't have the time or resources to do that.

This legislation would require an equity assessment of the state budget, the largest piece of legislation you vote upon each year. It would also allow for up to 20 additional pieces of legislation to receive equity impact statements. We think this is an important first step to creating an environment where the General Assembly considers equity in public policy.



**Rhode Island**

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At a time when the very concept of equity is under attack, the Rhode Island General Assembly has an opportunity to make a clear statement that equity matters in our public policy. Common Cause Rhode Island urges you to pass H 7236 and center equity in our public policy.