



Memo To: House State Government & Elections Committee  
From: Kelly Nevins, CEO, Women's Fund of Rhode Island  
Date: January 27, 2026  
Regards: Support of Bill H7236

The Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) strongly supports **H7236**, legislation that would establish a two-year pilot program requiring equity impact statements for up to twenty General Assembly bills per session and require that the Governor's proposed budget include a clear explanation of how budget decisions advance equity.

WFRI's mission is to invest in women and girls through research, advocacy, grantmaking, and strategic partnerships to achieve gender equity through systemic change. Central to that mission is the belief that policymaking should be informed not only by fiscal considerations, but also by a clear understanding of how laws and budgets affect people differently based on race, gender, disability, age, and other protected characteristics.

Equity impact statements are a practical, forward-looking governance tool. Much like fiscal notes, they provide lawmakers with structured information before decisions are finalized—helping identify whether a proposal is likely to reduce disparities, reinforce existing inequities, or have no meaningful impact. Importantly, H7236 does not mandate outcomes; it strengthens decision-making by ensuring legislators and the public have better information.

This bill is particularly strong because it:

- Establishes a **limited, manageable pilot program**, capped at twenty bills per session, allowing the General Assembly to test and refine the process.
- Empowers legislative leadership and the **Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus (RIBLIA)** to request equity impact statements, ensuring thoughtful and representative use.
- Assigns responsibility to the **Commission on Health Advocacy & Equity (CHAE)**, leveraging existing expertise and coordination with state agencies and higher education.
- Requires equity impact statements to be **publicly available prior to committee hearings**, increasing transparency and strengthening public trust.
- Extends equity analysis beyond individual bills to include **agency budget submissions and the Governor's recommended budget**, recognizing that budgets are among the most powerful policy tools the government has.

Rhode Island continues to face persistent disparities, including the gender pay gap, racial wealth gaps, unequal health outcomes, and barriers to safe housing and economic security. Too often, these disparities are not the result of intent, but of policies enacted without adequate analysis of their real-world effects. H7236 helps prevent unintended consequences before they occur, saving time, resources, and harm.

***At a moment when access to data and equity-focused analysis is increasingly politicized at the federal level, H7236 positions Rhode Island as a leader in transparent, responsible, and evidence-informed policymaking.*** This bill aligns with best practices adopted in other states and reflects Rhode Island's stated commitment to fairness, accountability, and good governance.

For these reasons, the Women's Fund of Rhode Island urges the committee to support **H7236** and take an important step toward a more equitable and effective legislative process.

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The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research, and strategic partnership designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. Our [Women's Well-Being Index](#) compares how well women fare against men on topics related to health, safety, economic security, education, and civic participation in every RI city/town. Our [policy briefs](#) are written in response to the data found on the Index. You can find more about our work at [www.wfri.org](http://www.wfri.org).