



State of Rhode Island COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

180 Westminster Street, Providence, RI 02903 – Tel. 401-222-2661

TESTIMONY

To: Constitutional Convention Commission

The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) opposes holding a Constitutional Convention

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. Among the laws over which the Commission has jurisdiction are Title 28, Chapter 5 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, the Fair Employment Practices Act (FEPA), and the Title 34, Chapter 37 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, the Fair Housing Practices Act (FHPA), which prohibit discrimination on a number of bases, including race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion.

Many of the civil rights protections added to the FEPA and the FHPA are not universally supported. For example, both laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity. There have been a number of initiatives across the country – and here in Rhode Island – to discourage gender identity protections and acceptance. See, e.g., *Providence Journal*, May 11, 2023, “Lawmakers are bringing the book ban wars to Rhode Island”; *Providence Journal*, April 11, 2022, “RI lawmakers hear impassioned debate on bill to limit teaching of racism, gender identity”. The FHPA prohibits discrimination based on source of income, which, among other things, prohibits discrimination against those with Section 8 vouchers. This protection is not supported by all landlords. See, e.g., *USA Today*, August 15, 2024, “Rental aid plan is failing families”. As history has taught, a Constitutional Convention would allow special interest groups (both within and outside of the state) with unlimited funds to wage a fight against civil rights protections currently afforded all Rhode Islanders.

For these reasons, the Commission urges that the Committee recommend against holding a Constitutional Convention.

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