

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, 4/8/26 – S2216

Back in 2022, I was pleased to have testified for both Senator de la Cruz' bill (S2219), as well as Rep Casimiro's companion House bill, which amended the definition of third degree sexual assault by closing a loophole which had allowed sexual penetration or contact perpetrated by an individual in a position of authority upon a person of 17 to occur. As you know, these bills became law on June 27th of that year, after virtually unanimous bicameral passage.

The above became law because members of both parties, both Representatives and Senators, knew it was the right thing to do for our RI's kids, and they showed it in the vote. I look at S2216 in much the same way. The only questions you need to ask yourselves are: "Do I care about RI's kids, or do I not?" "Am I willing to go the extra mile to protect these innocent lives, or do I side with those among us who have sought, or seek, to do them harm?"

Based on my interactions in this building since that time, I have not seen close to the same level of bi-partisan teamwork I saw during the 2022 timeframe. *Freedom to Read* and the *Healthcare Provider Shield* laws come to mind. Those aside, this is an opportunity where you can show the people of Rhode Island two things:

- Democrats and Republicans can still work together, and
- The safety and well-being of RI's kids transcend having a D or an R after one's name.

This bill also closes most if not all information gaps on perspective employees by requiring a more thorough examination of the applicant's past as it relates to interaction with children...information that could easily missed, hidden, or not revealed by the applicant, or simply not asked by the hiring district. I would add yearly or bi-yearly post-hire re-checks for incidents regarding children outside of school. This idea has merit, for obvious reasons, as we've seen incidents in schools with employees over the past few years, which might have been avoided.

This is important and much-needed legislation. It simply requires more effort on the part of an applicant in terms of revealing his or her past relative to children. It also requires hiring districts to be more diligent in terms of whom they bring into an environment where our most cherished spend the bulk of their days nine to ten months every year. You could really show Rhode Islanders something by not even holding this bill for further study. Pass it via vote tonight, and send it to the full Senate for a vote. Thank you.

Robert J. Chiaradio, Jr.

Westerly