

Senate Finance Committee
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
Room 211
May 14, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of S 3251 — Rule of 90 Legislation

Good afternoon Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Heather Croteau. I am submitting testimony in my capacity as Committee on Political Education Secretary for SEIU Local 580, representing more than 850 public sector employees across nine Rhode Island state agencies: Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF), Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), Office of Health and Human Services (OHHS), Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), Department of Business Regulation (DBR), Department of Public Utilities and Carriers (DPUC), Office of Library Information Services (OLIS) and Department of Labor and Training (DLT). These provide critical public services to Rhode Islanders every day.

Our members work in some of the most demanding areas of public service. They protect vulnerable children, support individuals with disabilities, administer essential benefits and services, oversee behavioral health systems, and help ensure the functioning of critical state operations throughout Rhode Island.

SEIU Local 580 strongly supports S 3251, the Rule of 90 legislation.

The 2011 pension reform significantly changed retirement expectations for public employees across Rhode Island. Many workers entered public service with an understanding of what a full career in state service would provide, only to see retirement eligibility delayed and long-term retirement security reduced. Those changes continue to impact workforce morale, recruitment, retention, and employees' ability to realistically plan for retirement after decades of public service.

For many public employees, the issue is not whether they want to continue serving the public. The issue is whether the current retirement structure remains sustainable after thirty years in emotionally demanding, high-stress, and increasingly complex public sector roles.

S 3251 represents a reasonable and targeted step toward restoring retirement flexibility for long-serving public employees. The legislation would allow eligible employees to retire at age 60 with at least 30 years of service, recognizing that thirty years of public service constitutes a full career.

This legislation is also important from a workforce perspective.

Across state government, agencies continue to face staffing shortages, recruitment challenges, and burnout among experienced employees. Public sector workers are being asked to manage increasingly complex responsibilities while operating within systems that are often understaffed and stretched thin. Retirement stability matters when recruiting and retaining experienced professionals in public service.

Strong retirement systems are not simply benefits packages. They are workforce investments. They help sustain institutional knowledge, improve retention, and demonstrate that Rhode Island values long-term public service.

The Rule of 90 will not impact every employee equally, and many employees will continue working beyond eligibility for financial or personal reasons. However, restoring a fair and predictable retirement pathway for employees who dedicate decades of service to the State of Rhode Island is an important step toward strengthening and stabilizing the public workforce.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 580 respectfully urges the committee to support S 3251.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Heather Croteau
COPE Secretary
SEIU Local 580