



International Brotherhood of Police Officers

A DIVISION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

March 27, 2025

The Honorable Senator Matthew L. LaMountain,
Chair Senate Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State Senate 82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

March 27, 2025

Dear Chairman, LaMountain and Honorable Committee Members,

While the International Brotherhood of Police Officers fully support the protection Constitutional Rights and absolutely support accountability for law enforcement and governmental officials and entities, we have major concerns regarding Senate Bill S-538 entitled the Rhode Island Civil Rights Act. On behalf of the International Brotherhood of Police Officers we write to express our strong opposition to Senate Bill S-538 for the following reasons.

The proposed bill would establish new remedial rights that significantly expand the ability to sue public officials and governmental entities under state constitutional provisions. This would expose municipalities and public employees, including law enforcement officers, to increased litigation without providing meaningful and substantial benefits to the public.

The proposed bill would encourage lawsuits against state and local governments and individual public officials and their agents which would include police officers. The ability to sue directly under state constitutional violations in all likelihood would encourage litigation, burden municipalities with legal expenses, and divert critical resources away from public services, including public safety.

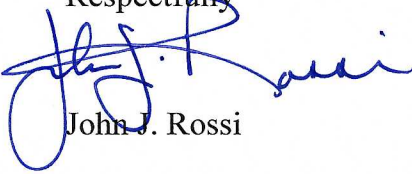
The proposed bill would in its practical impact weaken qualified immunity and those protections already in place. Subjecting law enforcement officers and other public employees to unnecessary legal battles. Without the procedural safeguards that currently exist under federal law, officers acting in good faith may find themselves embroiled in costly and lengthy lawsuits, deterring effective policing and decision-making in critical situations.



The International Brotherhood of Police Officers believe that Federal and state laws already provide adequate avenues for individuals to seek redress for civil rights violations, including through federal courts under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The assertion that Rhode Islanders currently lack a mechanism to enforce their state constitutional rights is incorrect, as many legal claims already incorporate both state and federal constitutional provisions.

The International Brotherhood of Police Officers recognize the importance of protecting civil liberties, we believe this bill is a misguided approach that will have negative consequences for public officials, law enforcement officers, and the very citizens we serve.

Respectfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John J. Rossi". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and "R".

National Representative
International Brotherhood of
Police Officers
NAGE/IBPO