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**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND**

## IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

## **JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026**

## AN ACT

## RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ACT

Introduced By: Representatives J. Lombardi, Hull, Cruz, and Stewart

Date Introduced: January 15, 2026

Referred To: House Labor

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 28 of the General Laws entitled "LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS"  
2 is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

## CHAPTER 61

4 WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ACT

**5                   28-61-1. Short title.**

6                   This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Workplace Psychological Safety  
7                   Act."

## **28-61-2. Public policy.**

12                   (1) Violates an employee's right to a physically and psychologically safe work  
13                   environment; and

14                   (2) Injures an employee, hinders the performance of an employee, stigmatizes the  
15                   employee and/or undermines the dignity of the employee

16                   **(b) This chapter declares and reasserts the obligation of employers to keep their employees**  
17                   **and their work environment safe, as set forth in laws throughout the state and the federal**  
18                   **government, including the Department of Labor Standards, a part of the Executive Office of Labor**

1 and Workforce Development, the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Occupational Safety and  
2 Health Act, (OSHA) which includes psychological safety.

3 **28-61-3. Purpose.**

4 It is the purpose of this chapter to:

5 (1) Recognize and protect an employee's right, not only to a physically safe work  
6 environment but also to a psychologically safe work environment in the workplace.

7 (2) Recognize and promote an employer's responsibility to acknowledge, monitor, prevent,  
8 discourage, and adequately address issues of psychological abuse in the workplace.

9 (3) Provide legal incentive for employers to acknowledge, monitor, prevent, discourage,  
10 and adequately address issues of psychological abuse to eliminate such behaviors before they  
11 disrupt the safety of the work environment and/or cause subsequent harm to employees.

12 (4) Provide legal relief and remedy for employees, harmed psychologically, emotionally,  
13 physically, professionally, or economically by exposure to an unsafe, toxic work environment,  
14 including any subsequent damages to make the harmed employees whole.

15 **28-61-4. Scope of application.**

16 This chapter shall apply to all employees, regardless of the nature of their job.

17 **28-61-5. Definitions.**

18 For the purposes of this chapter, the terms used herein shall have the meanings set forth in  
19 this section:

20 (1) "Bullying" means interpersonal abuse that operates employee(s)-to-employee(s),  
21 especially superior(s) to subordinate(s).

22 (2) "Mobbing" means an interpersonal abuse system that operates employer-to-  
23 employee(s).

24 (3) "Psychological abuse" means mentally provocative harassment. Mistreatment that has  
25 the effect of hurting, weakening, confusing, or frightening a person mentally or emotionally causing  
26 harm and the impairment of a person's mental health, as established by competent evidence.

27 (4) "Psychological injury" means impairment of a person's mental health, as established by  
28 competent evidence and may manifest mentally, emotionally, or physically.

29 (5) "Psychologically safe work environment" means a work environment free of  
30 psychological abuse.

31 (6) "Physical injury" means impairment of a person's physical health or bodily integrity, as  
32 established by competent evidence and which may manifest mentally, emotionally, or physically.

33 (7) "Reasonable person" means an unbiased person who displays reason, fairness, caution,  
34 and care.

(8) "Representative employee" means administrative employees in leadership and/or management positions, whose responsibility is to oversee and enforce organizational policies, including, but not limited to, CEOs, CFOs, presidents, vice presidents, executive directors, members of a board of directors, or employees employed in the areas of human resources, legal, or diversity, equity, and inclusion.

(9) "Third party" means a neutral person, with no prior affiliation with the parties.

(10) "Toxic work environment" means an intolerable employment condition, in which a reasonable person would find it difficult, uncomfortable, and/or an impossible environment to perform their workplace duties and tasks.

## **28-61-6. Employee right to dignity and a psychologically safe work environment.**

Every employee shall have the right to a work environment that is safe and affords them the dignity, to which all human beings are entitled, free from all forms of psychological abuse.

## 28-61-7. Employer responsibility to provide safe work environments and ensure dignity.

Employers have a general duty to provide a safe work environment, free from all forms of abuse including psychological abuse. Employers have a general duty to ensure that all employees are treated respectfully and with dignity.

**28-61-8. Prohibited activity.**

(a) It shall be an unlawful employment practice for any employer or employee to engage in the psychological abuse of another employee, that creates a toxic work environment in which a reasonable person would find intolerable to perform their regular workplace duties and tasks, has the ability to cause injury, and/or jeopardizes future career prospects, without just cause. The determination of which shall be conducted from the view of a reasonable person, under the totality of the circumstances, its impact on the work environment of the employee, and/or its subsequent impact on the employee's well-being.

(b) It shall be an unlawful employment practice to retaliate in any manner against an employee, who has opposed any unlawful employment practices under this chapter, including, but not limited to, filing a claim internally or externally on behalf of oneself or another objecting to behavior in violation of this chapter, whether as an complainant, witness, or advocate.

(c) It shall be an unlawful employment practice to require any complainant under this chapter, to enter into mediation or forced arbitration.

(d) Conduct that does not constitute psychological abuse includes, but is not limited to:

(1) Acts intended to exercise a supervisor's authority to discipline with just cause and conducted in a progressive disciplinary manner, in compliance with policies and laws;

1                   (2) Demands for protecting the confidentiality of the services provided by the employer;  
2                   (3) The formulation or promulgation of regulations or memoranda to direct the operations,  
3                   maximize efficiency, and evaluate employees' performance, based on the general objectives of the  
4                   employer;

5                   (4) The temporary assignment of additional duties when necessary to ensure the continuity  
6                   of services;

7                   (5) Administrative actions directed to the completion of an employment agreement, with  
8                   cause; and

9                   (6) Employer's affirmative actions to enforce the provisions of a human resources  
10                  regulation, clauses of employment agreements, or obligations, duties, and prohibitions established  
11                  by law.

12                  (e) Concerted activity/Section 7 activity under the National Labor Relations Act, as  
13                  interpreted by the National Labor Relations Board, shall not be construed as psychological abuse.

14                  **28-61-9. Procedure.**

15                  (a) Every employer shall be responsible for taking all reasonable measures to acknowledge,  
16                  monitor, prevent, discourage, and adequately address incidents of psychological abuse.

17                  (b) Within one hundred eighty (180) days of the effective date of this chapter, every  
18                  employer shall:

19                  (1) Adopt and implement preventive controls and detective controls to include internal  
20                  policies against psychological abuse, including anti-retaliation policies, consistent with this  
21                  chapter. Policies should include a broad reporting procedure, including formal and informal  
22                  reporting methods.

23                  (2) Notify and train all managers, supervisors, and other representative employees as to  
24                  handling complaints of psychologically abusive behavior, including the employer's reporting  
25                  provisions and policies to acknowledge, monitor, prevent, discourage and adequately address all  
26                  such complaints.

27                  (3) Post employees' rights under this chapter and employer reporting policies, in such a  
28                  manner that all employees have access, including on the website, bulletin boards, job descriptions,  
29                  and in applicable promotional materials.

30                  (4) Implement and uphold an effective anti-retaliation provision, that guarantees no  
31                  retaliation against any employee, who has opposed any unlawful practice in a complaint under this  
32                  chapter.

33                  (5) Implement an investigation policy for all complaints of psychologically abusive  
34                  behavior, which includes notice provisions for complainant, regarding the status, completion, and

1     outcome of the complaint and imposes a policy of progressive discipline for any employee  
2     determined to have engaged in psychologically abusive behavior.

3         (6) Apply evaluation and discipline processes evenly and fairly to all employees.  
4         (7) Annually perform an anonymous workplace climate survey, with its results to be  
5     annually submitted to OSHA for private sector employers and the department of labor and training  
6     for public sector employers.

7         (8) Report annually the number of employee complaints of abusive behavior, employee  
8     disciplines, workers' compensation claims, absenteeism rates, stress leave rates, attrition rates,  
9     discrimination complaints, investigation rates, follow up action rates, the workforce gender and  
10    racial makeup, and de-identified wage and salary data by protected category to OSHA for private  
11    sector employers and the department of labor and training for public sector employers, who shall  
12    make this information publicly available, at a minimum under the federal Freedom of Information  
13    Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552.

14         (c) If the employer proves to have exercised reasonable care to prevent and promptly  
15    correct the conduct, such employer shall be held harmless, from any claim under the provisions of  
16    this chapter.

17         (d) The aggrieved employee shall have the following options to notify the employer of the  
18    complaint, without use of the employer's protocol:

19             (1) File a complaint which the employer will not receive a copy of the complaint until there  
20    is litigation, that discloses the complainant's identity directly to the department of labor and  
21    training. The department shall:

22             (i) Evaluate the conditions described in the complaint.

23             (ii) If it is determined that the complaint describes a potential violation, assign the case to  
24    an inspector.

25             (iii) Contact the employer in writing and require the employer to respond by a due date,  
26    with proof that the hazard has been corrected; or make an appointment for a site visit prioritized,  
27    according to the nature of the hazard; or phone or visit the workplace the same day, if there is  
28    imminent danger and issue fines and/or penalties, including legal action, to violators.

29             (iv) Make violations of this chapter available to the public per the Freedom of Information  
30    Act, redacting all private information as to the aggrieved employee, including their name to protect  
31    their privacy and not interfere with future job prospects.

32             (v) If applicable, forward the complaint to another agency with jurisdiction including  
33    OSHA for private sector employees.

34             (vi) Collect and maintain data on the effectiveness of this chapter, as determined by a

1      decrease in employees self-reporting experiencing psychological abuse at work.

2            (2) File suit against the employer for violation(s) of this chapter, directly through the  
3            judicial branch.

4            **28-61-10. Employer liability.**

5            Any employer that allows, engages in, or promotes psychological abuse, whereby creating  
6            a toxic work environment, shall be liable to the affected employee(s).

7            Every employer shall:

8            (1) Be liable for failing to take the appropriate measures to provide employees with a  
9            psychologically safe work environment, as outlined in this chapter.

10            (2) Be liable for engaging in any violation of this chapter.

11            (3) Be liable for any damages, including economic, compensatory, and punitive damages,  
12            to any employee who has been subjected to work in a toxic work environment, as outlined in this  
13            chapter in the scope of their employment, unless the employer can demonstrate they have met all  
14            elements of the affirmative defense provided in § 28-61-12. An employee is entitled to recover the  
15            greater of all actual damages or five thousand dollars (\$5,000) for each violation of this chapter.

16            (4) If not prevailing, be liable for the plaintiff's reasonable attorneys' and witnesses' fees  
17            and costs.

18            **28-61-11. Scope of the protection.**

19            (a) Any person who reports psychological abuse, shall be protected by this chapter.

20            (b) No person shall aid, abet, incite, compel, or coerce the doing of an act forbidden under  
21            this chapter or to attempt to do so.

22            (c) No employer shall terminate, sanction, mislead, coerce, intimidate, threaten, interfere  
23            with, discriminate against, or otherwise retaliate against any person in the opposition of unlawful  
24            employment practices or exercise of any right under this chapter, including, but not limited to, an  
25            employee as to the terms, conditions, compensation, location, benefits, or privileges of employment  
26            because the employee or witness offers or attempts to offer, verbally or in writing, any testimony,  
27            statement, information, or claim to a labor union, human resources office, employer office,  
28            legislative, administrative, or judicial forum, or any other internal or external office or otherwise  
29            engages in any other reasonable participation in a claim under this chapter, insofar as such  
30            statements constitute a disclosure of privileged information, as provided by law.

31            (d) The employee shall show proof of the violation through direct and circumstantial  
32            evidence.

33            (e) The employee may establish a prima facie case of violation of the law, by proving that  
34            the employee reported an incident of workplace psychological abuse and was subsequently

1       terminated, threatened, or discriminated against in their employment. Once the prima facie case is  
2       established, the employer may allege and provide a legitimate and nondiscriminatory ground for  
3       the termination. If the employer alleges and provides such grounds, the employee shall show that  
4       the grounds alleged by the employer were a mere pretext for termination.

5       **28-61-12. Affirmative defense.**

6       (a) An employer may establish an affirmative defense to psychological abuse under this  
7       chapter, where the employer took all steps outlined in this chapter to acknowledge, monitor,  
8       prevent, discourage, and adequately address the issues and complaints surrounding allegations of  
9       psychological abuse and exercised reasonable care to prevent and promptly correct any violation  
10       in this chapter or acted with just cause.

11       (b) This chapter requires employers to take all reasonable necessary steps to adequately  
12       address complaints of psychological abuse, an employer shall not be exempt from liability if the  
13       employer or its representative employees or supervisors knew or should have known of said  
14       conduct and failed to acknowledge, monitor, prevent, discourage, or address the allegations of  
15       psychological abuse and promptly correct the situation.

16       (c) The affirmative defense specified in subsection (a) of this section shall not be available  
17       when the employer or its representative employees or supervisors engage in prohibited conduct.

18       **28-61-13. Remedies.**

19       (a) Complainants who prove a violation of this chapter, shall be entitled to all remedies  
20       necessary to make such complainants whole.

21       (b) In ordering a remedy or judgment the court may consider:  
22        (1) The extent or pervasiveness of the toxic atmosphere of the work environment;  
23        (2) Whether the defendant has acknowledged or apologized for the conduct; and  
24        (3) Whether the employer has instituted corrective training and/or discipline for violations  
25       of this chapter.

26       (c) The court may order on behalf of the prevailing plaintiff:  
27        (1) Reinstatement of work;  
28        (2) Economic damages for lost wages;  
29        (3) Expenses related to treatment related to the psychological abuse, including future  
30       medical expenses for psychological injury or resulting physical injury;  
31        (4) Compensable damages to compensate for the resulting pain and suffering and emotional  
32       and psychological damages;  
33        (5) Punitive damages to deter future acts of psychological abuse;  
34        (6) Injunctive relief, whereby the court may enjoin the defendant from engaging in the

1       unlawful employment practice;  
2           (7) Public notification of the case outcome, without disclosing the plaintiff's name, if  
3       desired by the plaintiff;  
4           (8) Attorneys' fees for the prevailing plaintiff; and  
5           (9) Any other relief deemed appropriate, including restorative measures, including  
6       modification of the disciplinary record of the employee and/or organizational training.

7           **28-61-14. Statute of limitations.**

8           Any person who has a cause of action under the provisions of this chapter, shall have the  
9       later of a period of three (3) years to file said cause of action from the last alleged psychologically  
10       abusive behavior from the employee with OSHA, or the department of labor and training (DLT),  
11       or a private cause of action. If a claimant files a complaint with OSHA or DLT, the statute of  
12       limitations for filing a private cause of action is tolled until final action or determination is made  
13       by OSHA or DLT.

14           **28-61-15. Severability clause.**

15           If any clause, paragraph, subparagraph, article, provision, section, or part of this chapter  
16       are held to be unconstitutional or void, the holding to that effect shall not affect, impair, or  
17       invalidate the remainder of this chapter. The effect of said holding shall be limited solely to the  
18       clause, paragraph, subparagraph, article, provision, section, or part thereof thus held to be  
19       unconstitutional or void.

20           **28-61-16. Conflict with laws.**

21           (a) Nothing in this chapter should limit employee rights under any other law including  
22       OSHA, laws under state-level OSHA agencies or their equivalent, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act,  
23       the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, state EEO laws,  
24       the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), and state labor rights laws.

25           (b) Nothing in this chapter shall restrict workers from negotiating broader protections  
26       through collective bargaining or other concerted activity.

27       SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL  
SAFETY ACT

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- 1        This act would prohibit any type of psychological abuse in the workplace inflicted by an employer, upon an employee or by a co-employee upon an employee, that results in the violation of an employee's right to a physically and psychologically safe work environment.
- 4        This act would also provide an employee, subject to bullying, psychological abuse, psychological injury and/or physical injury, with protections in the workplace and civil remedies against perpetrators of any prohibited activity. This act would further assess civil penalties upon employers violating the act, based upon the gross amount of revenues earned by employers, in addition to civil liability for damages sustained by the employee, as well as civil and criminal liability for any such conduct of a co-employee.
- 10        This act would take effect upon passage.

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