

2026 -- S 2603

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LC004851
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEDURE -- PROCEDURE GENERALLY --
CAUSES OF ACTION

Introduced By: Senators McKenney, Ciccone, Tikoian, Britto, and LaMountain

Date Introduced: February 13, 2026

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 9-1 of the General Laws entitled "Causes of Action" is hereby
2 amended by adding thereto the following section:

3 **9-1-55. Limitations on actions based on defamation relating to sexual assault,**
4 **harassment or discrimination.**

5 (a) An individual making a communication regarding an incident of sexual assault,
6 harassment, or discrimination, upon proof the communication was made without malice or gross
7 negligence, shall have an affirmative defense to civil liability in any action for defamation.

8 (b) For the purposes of this section, "communication" means factual information related to
9 an incident of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination experienced by the individual making
10 the communication, including, but not limited to, any of the following:

11 (1) An act of sexual assault;

12 (2) An act of sexual harassment;

13 (3) An act of workplace harassment or discrimination, failure to prevent an act of
14 workplace harassment or discrimination, aiding, abetting, inciting, compelling, or coercing an act
15 of workplace harassment or discrimination, or an act of retaliation against a person for reporting or
16 opposing workplace harassment or discrimination as defined in § 28-51-1;

17 (4) An act of harassment or discrimination, or an act of retaliation against a person for
18 reporting harassment or discrimination, by the owner of a housing accommodation, as described in

1 chapter 37 of title 34;

2 (5) An act of harassment or discrimination, or an act of retaliation against a person for
3 reporting harassment or discrimination, based on employment or housing or racial discrimination;

4 (6) An act of cyber sexual bullying, as defined in § 16-21-34; or

5 (7) An act of sexual harassment in an institution of higher education described in chapters
6 76 and 76.1 of title 16.

7 (c) A prevailing defendant in any defamation action brought against that defendant for
8 making a communication in which the defendant prevails upon the affirmative defense provided
9 pursuant to subsection (a) of this section shall be entitled to their reasonable attorneys' fees and
10 costs for successfully defending the litigation, plus treble damages for any harm caused to the
11 defendant by the defamation action in addition to any other relief otherwise permitted by law.

12 (d) This section shall only apply to an individual that has, or at any time had, a reasonable
13 basis to file a complaint of sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination, whether the complaint is,
14 or was, filed or not.

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

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

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1 This act would grant an affirmative defense for certain privileged communications,
2 including communications made by an individual, without malice, regarding an incident of sexual
3 assault, harassment, or discrimination and would specify the attorneys' fees and damages available
4 to a prevailing defendant in any defamation action brought against that defendant for making that
5 communication.

6 This act would take effect upon passage.

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