

2026 -- S 3217

=====
LC006303
=====

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO DOMESTIC RELATIONS -- DOMESTIC ABUSE PREVENTION

Introduced By: Senator Samuel W. Bell

Date Introduced: April 14, 2026

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 15-15-1 and 15-15-3 of the General Laws in Chapter 15-15 entitled
2 "Domestic Abuse Prevention" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **15-15-1. Definitions.**

4 The following words as used in this chapter have the following meanings:

5 (1) "Course of conduct" means a pattern of conduct composed of a series of acts over a
6 period of time, evidencing a continuity of purpose. Constitutionally protected activity is not
7 included within the meaning of "course of conduct."

8 (2) "Courts" means the family court.

9 (3) "Cyberstalking" means transmitting any communication by computer to any person or
10 causing any person to be contacted for the sole purpose of harassing that person or his or her family.

11 (4) "Domestic abuse" means:

12 The occurrence of one or more of the following acts between present or former family
13 members, parents, stepparents, a plaintiff parent's minor child(ren) to which the defendant is not a
14 blood relative or relative by marriage, adult plaintiffs who are or have been in a substantive dating
15 or engagement relationship within the past one year and who are (either individually or together)
16 parents of minor children, or persons who are or have been in a substantive dating or engagement
17 relationship within the past one year in which at least one of the persons is a minor:

18 (i) Attempting to cause or causing physical harm;

19 (ii) Placing another in fear of imminent serious physical harm;

1 (iii) Causing another to engage involuntarily in sexual relations by force, threat of force, or
2 duress; or

3 (iv) Stalking or cyberstalking.

4 (5) “Harassing” means following a knowing and willful course of conduct directed at a
5 specific person with the intent to seriously alarm, annoy, or bother the person, and which serves no
6 legitimate purpose. The course of conduct must be such as would cause a reasonable person to
7 suffer substantial emotional distress, or be in fear of bodily injury.

8 (6) "Household pet" means a domesticated or tamed animal kept for companionship or
9 pleasure.

10 ~~(6)~~(7) “Parents” mean persons who together are the legal parents of one or more children,
11 regardless of their marital status or whether they have lived together at any time.

12 ~~(7)~~(8) “Present or former family member” means the spouse, former spouse, minor
13 children, stepchildren, a plaintiff parent’s minor child(ren) to which the defendant is not a blood
14 relative or relative by marriage, minor children of substantive dating partners, or persons who are
15 related by blood or marriage.

16 ~~(8)~~(9) “Sexual exploitation” means the occurrence of any of the following acts by any
17 person who knowingly or willfully encourages, aids, or coerces any child under the age of eighteen
18 (18) years:

19 (i) Recruiting, employing, enticing, soliciting, isolating, harboring, transporting, providing,
20 persuading, obtaining, or maintaining, or so attempting, any minor for the purposes of commercial
21 sex acts or sexually explicit performances; or selling or purchasing a minor for the purposes of
22 commercial sex acts.

23 (A) “Commercial sex act” means any sex act or sexually explicit performance on account
24 of which anything of value is given, promised to, or received, directly or indirectly, by any person.

25 (B) “Sexually explicit performance” means an act or show, intended to arouse, satisfy the
26 sexual desires of, or appeal to the prurient interests of patrons or viewers, whether public or private,
27 live, photographed, recorded, or videotaped.

28 ~~(9)~~(10) “Stalking” means harassing another person or willfully, maliciously, and repeatedly
29 following another person with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear of bodily injury.

30 ~~(10)~~(11) “Substantive dating” or “engagement relationship” means a significant and
31 personal/intimate relationship that shall be adjudged by the court’s consideration of the following
32 factors:

33 (i) The length of time of the relationship;

34 (ii) The type of relationship; and

1 (iii) The frequency of interaction between the parties.

2 **15-15-3. Protective orders — Penalty — Jurisdiction.**

3 (a) A person, or a parent, custodian, or legal guardian on behalf of a minor child or the
4 director of the department of children, youth and families (“DCYF”) or its designee for a child in
5 the custody of DCYF, pursuant to §§ 40-11-7 and 40-11-7.1, suffering from domestic abuse or
6 sexual exploitation as defined in § 15-15-1, may file a complaint in the family court requesting any
7 order that will protect and support her or him from abuse or sexual exploitation, including, but not
8 limited to, the following:

9 (1) Ordering that the defendant be restrained and enjoined from contacting, assaulting,
10 molesting, sexually exploiting, or interfering with the plaintiff at home, on the street, or elsewhere,
11 whether the defendant is an adult or a minor;

12 (2) Ordering the defendant to vacate the household immediately, and further providing in
13 the order for the safety and welfare of all household animals and pets;

14 (3) Awarding the plaintiff custody of the minor children of the parties, if any;

15 (4) Awarding the plaintiff possession of the household pet(s), if any, including the
16 enforcement remedy of a restraining order or other injunctive relief if necessary;

17 ~~(4)~~(5) Ordering the defendant to surrender physical possession of all firearms in his or her
18 possession, care, custody, or control and shall further order a person restrained not to purchase or
19 receive, or attempt to purchase or receive, any firearms while the protective order is in effect. The
20 defendant shall surrender said firearms within twenty-four (24) hours of notice of the protective
21 order to the Rhode Island state police or local police department or to a federally licensed firearms
22 dealer.

23 (i) A person ordered to surrender possession of any firearm(s) pursuant to this section shall,
24 within seventy-two (72) hours after being served with the order, either:

25 (A) File with the court a receipt showing the firearm(s) was physically surrendered to the
26 Rhode Island state police or local police department, or to a federally licensed firearms dealer; or

27 (B) Attest to the court that, at the time of the order, the person had no firearms in his or her
28 immediate physical possession or control, or subject to their immediate physical possession or
29 control, and that the person, at the time of the attestation, has no firearms in their immediate
30 physical possession or control, or subject to their immediate physical possession or control.

31 (ii) If a person restrained under this section transfers a firearm(s) to a federally licensed
32 firearms dealer pursuant to this section, the person restrained under this section may instruct the
33 federally licensed firearms dealer to sell the firearm(s) or to transfer ownership, in accordance with
34 state and federal law, to a qualified named individual who is not a member of the person’s dwelling

1 house, who is not related to the person by blood, marriage, or relationship as defined by ~~§ 15-15-~~
2 ~~4(7)~~ [§ 15-15-1](#), and who is not prohibited from possessing firearms under state or federal law. The
3 owner of any firearm(s) sold shall receive any financial value received from its sale, less the cost
4 associated with taking possession of, storing, and transferring of the firearm(s).

5 (iii) Every individual to whom ownership of a firearm(s) is transferred pursuant to this
6 subsection shall be prohibited from transferring or returning any firearm(s) to the person restrained
7 under this section while the protective order remains in effect and shall be informed of this
8 prohibition, Any knowing violation of this subsection is a felony that shall be punishable by a fine
9 of not more than one thousand dollars (\$1,000), or by imprisonment for a term of not less than one
10 year and not more than five (5) years, or both.

11 (iv) An individual to whom ownership of a firearm(s) is transferred pursuant to this
12 subsection shall return a firearm(s) to the person formerly restrained under this section only if the
13 person formerly restrained under this section provides documentation issued by a court indicating
14 that the restraining order issued pursuant to this section that prohibited the person from purchasing,
15 carrying, transporting, or possessing firearms has expired and has not been extended;

16 (5) After notice to the respondent and a hearing, ordering either party to make payments
17 for the support of a minor child or children of the parties as required by law for a period not to
18 exceed ninety (90) days, unless the child support order is for a child or children receiving public
19 assistance pursuant to chapter 5.1 of title 40 [repealed]. In these cases, legal counsel for the division
20 of taxation, child support enforcement, shall be notified as a party in interest to appear for the
21 purpose of establishing a child support order under a new or existing docket number previously
22 assigned to the parties and not under the protective docket number. The child support order shall
23 remain in effect until the court modifies or suspends the order.

24 (b) After notice to the respondent and a hearing, which shall be held within fifteen (15)
25 days of surrendering said firearms, the court, in addition to any other restrictions, may, for any
26 protective order issued after or renewed on or after July 1, 2017, continue the order of surrender,
27 and shall further order a person restrained under this section not to purchase or receive, or attempt
28 to purchase or receive, any firearms while the protective order is in effect.

29 (c) The family court shall provide a notice on all forms requesting a protective order that a
30 person restrained under this section shall be ordered pursuant to § 11-47-5 to surrender possession
31 of any firearms while the protective order is in effect. The form shall further provide that any person
32 who has surrendered his or her firearms shall be afforded a hearing within fifteen (15) days of
33 surrendering his or her firearms.

34 (d) Any firearm surrendered in accordance with this section to the Rhode Island state police

1 or local police department shall be returned to the person formerly restrained under this section
2 upon the person's request when:

3 (1) The person formerly restrained under this section produces documentation issued by a
4 court indicating that the restraining order issued pursuant to this section that prohibited the person
5 from purchasing, carrying, transporting, or possessing firearms has expired and has not been
6 extended; and

7 (2) The law enforcement agency in possession of the firearms determined that the person
8 formerly restrained under this section is not otherwise prohibited from possessing a firearm under
9 state or federal law.

10 (3) The person required to surrender their firearms pursuant to this section shall not be
11 responsible for any costs of storage of any firearms surrendered pursuant to this section.

12 (e) The Rhode Island state police are authorized to develop rules and procedures pertaining
13 to the storage and return of firearms surrendered to the Rhode Island state police or local police
14 departments pursuant to this section. The Rhode Island state police may consult with the Rhode
15 Island Police Chiefs' Association in developing rules and procedures.

16 (f) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit, expand, or in any way modify orders
17 issued under § 12-29-7 or § 15-5-19.

18 (g) Nothing in this section shall limit a defendant's right under existing law to petition the
19 court at a later date for modification of the order.

20 (h) The court shall immediately notify the person suffering from domestic abuse whose
21 complaint gave rise to the protective order, and the law enforcement agency where the person
22 restrained under this section resides, of the hearing.

23 (i) The person suffering from domestic abuse, local law enforcement, and the person
24 restrained under this section shall all have an opportunity to be present and to testify when the court
25 considers the petition.

26 (j) At the hearing, the person restrained under this section shall have the burden of showing,
27 by clear and convincing evidence, that, if his or her firearm rights were restored, he or she would
28 not pose a danger to the person suffering from domestic abuse or to any other person.

29 (1) In determining whether to restore a person's firearm rights, the court shall examine all
30 relevant evidence, including, but not limited to: the complaint seeking a protective order; the
31 criminal record of the person restrained under this section; the mental health history of the person
32 restrained under this section; any evidence that the person restrained under this section has, since
33 being served with the order, engaged in violent or threatening behavior against the person suffering
34 from domestic abuse or any other person.

1 (2) If the court determines, after a review of all relevant evidence and after all parties have
2 had an opportunity to be heard, that the person restrained under this section would not pose a danger
3 to the person suffering from domestic abuse or to any other person if their firearm rights were
4 restored, then the court may grant the petition and modify the protective order and lift the firearm
5 prohibition.

6 (3) If the court lifts a person's firearms prohibition pursuant to this subsection, the court
7 shall issue the person written notice that the person is no longer prohibited under this section from
8 purchasing or possessing firearms while the protective order is in effect.

9 (k) The prohibition against possessing a firearm(s) due solely to the existence of a domestic
10 violence restraining order issued under this section shall not apply with respect to sworn peace
11 officers as defined in § 12-7-21 and active members of military service, including members of the
12 reserve components thereof, who are required by law or departmental policy to carry departmental
13 firearms while on duty or any person who is required by their employment to carry a firearm in the
14 performance of their duties. Any individual exempted pursuant to this exception may possess a
15 firearm only during the course of their employment. Any firearm required for employment must be
16 stored at the place of employment when not being possessed for employment use; all other
17 firearm(s) must be surrendered in accordance with this section.

18 (l) Upon motion by the plaintiff, the plaintiff's address shall be released only at the
19 discretion of the family court judge.

20 (m)(1) Any violation of the protective orders in subsection (a) of this section shall subject
21 the defendant to being found in contempt of court.

22 (2) The contempt order shall not be exclusive and shall not preclude any other available
23 civil or criminal remedies. Any relief granted by the court shall be for a fixed period of time not to
24 exceed three (3) years, at the expiration of which time the court may extend any order, upon motion
25 of the plaintiff, for any additional time, that it deems necessary to protect the plaintiff from abuse.
26 The court may modify its order at any time upon motion of either party.

27 (n)(1) Any violation of a protective order under this chapter of which the defendant has
28 actual notice shall be a misdemeanor that shall be punished by a fine of no more than one thousand
29 dollars (\$1,000) or by imprisonment for not more than one year, or both. Beginning July 1, 2025,
30 said violation shall be prosecuted by an attorney appointed by the prosecuting authority who shall
31 self-certify that they have successfully completed a specialized domestic violence prosecution
32 training course and updated training every four (4) years thereafter, aligned with national best
33 practices and eligible for continuing legal education credit(s) as approved by the Rhode Island Bar
34 Association.

1 (2) The penalties for violation of this section shall also include the penalties as provided
2 by § 12-29-5.

3 (o) Beginning July 1, 2025, said violation shall, at the initial appearance, be presented by
4 a member of a law enforcement agency and/or prosecuted by an attorney appointed by the
5 prosecuting authority all of whom shall self-certify that they have successfully completed a
6 specialized domestic violence prosecution training course and updated training every four (4) years
7 thereafter, aligned with national best practices and eligible for continuing legal education credit(s)
8 as approved by the Rhode Island Bar Association.

9 (p) Actual notice means that the defendant has received a copy of the order by service or
10 by being handed a copy of the order by a police officer pursuant to § 15-15-5(d).

11 (q)(1) The district court shall have criminal jurisdiction over all adult violations of this
12 chapter.

13 (2) The family court shall have jurisdiction over all juvenile violations of this chapter.

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

=====
LC006303
=====

EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO DOMESTIC RELATIONS -- DOMESTIC ABUSE PREVENTION

1 This act would permit the family court to award possession of household pets to the
2 plaintiff in a domestic abuse complaint, including the enforcement remedy of a restraining order or
3 other injunctive relief.

4 This act would take effect upon passage.

=====
LC006303
=====