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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY -- THE EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT AND  
BUDGET EQUITY IMPACT ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Morales, Felix, and Batista

Date Introduced: April 30, 2025

Referred To: House State Government & Elections

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1           SECTION 1. Legislative findings and purpose.

2           (1) Persistent, widespread, and unacceptable disparities exist in Rhode Island for  
3 individuals and families due to structural inequities and past discrimination. Such disparities  
4 include the racial wealth gap, the gender pay gap, and incarceration policies that have  
5 disproportionately impacted communities of color.

6           (2) Rhode Island has already enacted legislation prohibiting discrimination based on race,  
7 color, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or  
8 country of ancestral origin, including in employment and housing matters.

9           (3) Discrimination and inequities based on these classifications is inconsistent with the  
10 protections outlined in the State constitution and Rhode Island legislation. These inequities affect  
11 the quality of life, access to services, access to safe and affordable housing, and access to capital,  
12 as well as educational and economic attainment for some Rhode Island populations differently than  
13 for others.

14           (4) For the most part, legislation in Rhode Island has been implemented without attention  
15 to disparities and equity. Some of this legislation has had disparate impacts on some of our  
16 communities. Because some legislation might have unanticipated negative impacts, it is important  
17 that legislators, when hearing and considering proposed legislation, have tools to understand the  
18 likely effects of such legislation on existing disparities.

(5) Equity Impact Statements can serve as a tool to inform legislators of potential consequences of policies that may have a disproportionate impact on historically disadvantaged populations prior to enacting new legislation, thus assuring that the general assembly takes each opportunity available to increase equity and decrease disparities.

(6) Beginning in 2007, some states, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, began implementing racial impact statements to address racial disparities in their criminal justice systems. In 2019, Maine created a permanent commission to address historic and pervasive racial inequity in legislation. This act aims to build on that foundation here in Rhode Island, proposing the inclusion of a new legislative tool, a broad Equity Impact Statement accounting for race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin.

(7) It is therefore the desire of the General Assembly to address the impacts of our legislation moving forward, and to do so with attention to equity and the impact our legislation will have on our diverse and varied communities. This chapter aims to add equity impact statements into the legislative process to contribute to the development of sound and fair policies.

SECTION 2. Title 22 of the General Laws entitled "GENERAL ASSEMBLY" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

## CHAPTER 20

### THE EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT AND BUDGET EQUITY IMPACT ACT

#### **22-20-1. Short title.**

This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Equity Impact Statement and Budget Equity Impact Act".

#### **22-20-2. Definitions.**

As used in this chapter, the following words and phrases shall have the following meanings:

(1) "Disparities" means economic, employment, health, education, public safety, and other differences between the state population as a whole and subgroups of the population as defined by race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, and/or country of ancestral origin.

(2) "Equity" means providing access and opportunities for all Rhode Island residents by ensuring that policies, programs, and the state budget correct historic disparities.

(3) "Equity impact statement" means documents intended to help legislators evaluate whether a public bill is likely to increase equity, decrease equity, or have no impact on equity, with equity considered in terms of one or more of the following categories: race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, and/or country of

1 ancestral origin.

2 (4) “State agency” means a state department, agency, office, or board of the state or any  
3 agency, office, or board of a quasi-public agency of the state.

4 **22-20-3. Pilot study of equity impact statements.**

5 (a) During the pilot study, beginning with the January 2026 general assembly session and  
6 ending in December 2028, equity impact statements may be requested for up to twenty (20) pieces  
7 of proposed legislation:

8 (1) The speaker of the house may request equity impact statements for up to five (5) pieces  
9 of proposed legislation in the house;

10 (2) The president of the senate may request equity impact assessment statements for up to  
11 five (5) pieces of proposed legislation in the senate; and

12 (3) The Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American and Pacific Islander  
13 Caucus (RIBLIA) may request equity impact statements for up to five (5) pieces of proposed  
14 legislation in the house and up to five (5) pieces of proposed legislation in the senate.

15 (b) The request for an equity impact statement shall identify which one or more of the  
16 following categories should be considered: race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation,  
17 gender identity or expression, disability, age, and/or country of ancestral origin.

18 **22-20-4. Responsibility to complete equity impact statements.**

19 (a) Requests for equity impact statements shall be sent to the commission on health  
20 advocacy & equity (CHAE). The CHAE shall coordinate with whichever state agency or agencies  
21 possess subject matter expertise proposed legislation. The CHAE shall be responsible for  
22 completing equity impact statements.

23 (b) At the request of the CHAE, all state agencies shall furnish such advice and information,  
24 documentary and otherwise, to said commission and its agents as is deemed necessary or desirable  
25 by the CHAE to facilitate the purposes of this section.

26 (c) The CHAE assigned to complete an equity impact statement may seek expertise or  
27 assistance from to provide information or otherwise help produce equity impact statements.

28 (d) The legislative council shall coordinate with the CHAE and oversee the formatting of  
29 equity impact statements and attach statements to the corresponding bills.

30 (e) Equity impact statements shall be made available to the public at the time that bills are  
31 posted for hearing in committees to ensure that the public and legislators have the information  
32 available in advance to inform testimony and hearings.

33 (f) Equity impact statements shall be deemed public records under the provisions of chapter  
34 2 of title 38 (“access to public records”).

1           **22-20-5. Content of Equity Impact Statements.**

2           (a) Where possible, equity impact statements shall include data as to historical and/or  
3 existing disparities and as to likely demographic impacts of proposed legislation; Such data could  
4 include, for example, differential healthcare outcomes, graduation rates, incarceration rates, or  
5 siting of pollution-producing businesses.

6           (b) Where possible, equity impact statements must include data as to historical and/or  
7 existing economic disparities and as to likely fiscal and/or economic impacts of proposed  
8 legislation; such data could include, for example, differential support for minority-owned  
9 businesses or for businesses owned by individuals with disabilities.

10          (c) For any particular protected category, the statement should include a conclusion as to  
11 whether the proposed legislation is likely to increase equity, likely to decrease equity, or likely to  
12 have no effect on equity.

13           **22-20-6. Responsibility to complete pilot study of equity impact statements.**

14          The CHAE shall be empowered to:

15          (1) Oversee a pilot study of equity impact statements as established in § 22-20-3.

16          (2) Conduct an evaluation of the pilot study of equity impact statements including, but not  
17 limited to, a survey or other method of assessing the extent to which legislators took equity and  
18 disparities into account prior to the pilot study and took equity and disparities into account  
19 following the pilot study.

20          (3) Have the authority to conduct hearings and interviews and receive testimony regarding  
21 matters pertinent to its purpose.

22          (4) Issue a report with recommendations to speaker of the house, the president of the senate,  
23 and the general assembly as to which processes and tools would enable policymakers to avoid  
24 creating or continuing, even unintentionally, disparities resulting from enacted legislation.

25          SECTION 3. Sections 35-3-3 and 35-3-4 of the General Laws in Chapter 35-3 entitled  
26 "State Budget" are hereby amended to read as follows:

27           **35-3-3. Responsibility of budget officer for budget.**

28          (a) The budget officer shall, under the supervision of the governor, prepare the annual state  
29 budget, assembling, correlating, and revising the estimates of revenues and requests for  
30 appropriations of the various departments of the state government.

31          (b) The budget officer shall, under the supervision of the governor, include in the annual  
32 state budget an explanation of the manner in which provisions of the budget further the governor's  
33 efforts to ensure equity in the state. For purposes of this section, "equity" means efforts, regulations,  
34 policies, programs, standards, processes and any other functions of government or principles of law

and governance intended to: identify and remedy past and present patterns of discrimination or inequality against and disparities in outcome for any class protected in §28-5-7(1)(i); ensure that such patterns of discrimination, inequality and disparities in outcome, whether intentional or unintentional, are neither reinforced nor perpetuated; and prevent the emergence and persistence of foreseeable future patterns of discrimination against, or disparities in, outcome for any class protected in § 28-5-7(1)(i).

**35-3-4. Estimates submitted by department heads.**

(a) On dates determined by the budget officer, but not later than the first day of October in each year, each head of a department of the state government, not including the general assembly or the judiciary, shall assemble, correlate, and revise, with power to increase or decrease, the estimates for expenditures and requests for appropriations for the next ensuing fiscal year of each of the divisions, boards, commissions, officers, bureaus, institutions, or agencies of the state included within his or her department, and, after this revision, shall prepare an itemized departmental estimate of the appropriations necessary to meet the financial needs of the department, including a statement in detail of all moneys for which any general or special appropriation is desired at the ensuing session of the general assembly. The estimate shall be in such form, and in such number of copies, and with such explanation as the budget officer may require, and, on dates determined by the budget officer, but not later than the first day of October in each year, shall be submitted to the governor through the budget officer and to the fiscal advisors of the house and senate.

(b) The estimates shall also include a supplemental presentation of estimates of expenditures for information resources and information technologies as defined in § 29-8-2 [repealed], regardless of source of financing. The estimate shall include a detailed listing and explanation of expenses and the source of funds and shall be in such form, and in such number of copies, and with such explanation as the budget officer may require. Copies shall be provided directly to the house fiscal advisor, the senate fiscal advisor, and the Rhode Island information resources management board.

(c) The estimates shall also include a supplemental presentation identifying which departmental programs and expenditures, ongoing or newly proposed, increase equity. For purposes of this section, "equity" means efforts, regulations, policies, programs, standards, processes and any other functions of government or principles of law and governance intended to: identify and remedy past and present patterns of discrimination or inequality against and disparities in outcome for any class protected in § 28-5-7(1)(i); ensure that such patterns of discrimination, inequality and disparities in outcome, whether intentional or unintentional, are neither reinforced

1 nor perpetuated; and prevent the emergence and persistence of foreseeable future patterns of  
2 discrimination against or disparities in outcome for any class protected in § 28-5-7(1)(i).

3 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY -- THE EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT AND  
BUDGET EQUITY IMPACT ACT

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- 1           This act would require statements as to whether a bill is likely to increase equity, decrease  
2 equity or have no impact on equity to be included on up to twenty (20) pieces of legislation. Five  
3 (5) pieces requested by the speaker, five (5) pieces requested by senate president and five (5) pieces  
4 in each chamber to be requested by the Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American  
5 and Pacific Islander Caucus. The act would also require such equity impact statements in the state  
6 budget.
- 7           This act would take effect on July 1, 2025.

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