

2026 -- H 7236

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S T A T E O F R H O D E I S L A N D

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

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

Introduced By: Representatives Morales, Cruz, Giraldo, Felix, Kislak, Alzate, Stewart, Ajello, Sanchez, and Potter

Date Introduced: January 21, 2026

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

12 (7) It is therefore the desire of the general assembly to address the impacts of our legislation
13 moving forward, and to do so with attention to equity and the impact our legislation will have on
14 our diverse and varied communities. This chapter aims to add Equity Impact Statements into the
15 legislative process to contribute to the development of sound and fair policies.

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

CHAPTER 20

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT ACT

22-20-1. Short title.

This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the “Equity Impact Statement 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
ances between the state population as a whole and subgroups of the population as defined by
olor, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age,
country of ancestral origin.

(2) “Equity” means providing access and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders by ensuring policies, programs, and the state budget correct historic disparities.

(3) “Equity impact statements” are documents intended to help legislators evaluate whether a 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 ancestral origin.

(4) "State agency" means a state department, agency, office, or board of the state or any

1 agency, office, or board of a quasi-public agency of the state.

2 **22-20-3. Pilot program for equity impact statements.**

3 (a) The pilot program for equity impact statements will last two (2) years, beginning in the
4 January 2027 general assembly session and ending in December 2028. During the pilot program,
5 equity impact statements may be requested for up to twenty (20) pieces of proposed legislation per
6 legislative session: the speaker of the house may request equity impact statements for up to five (5)
7 pieces of proposed legislation in the house; the president of the senate may request equity impact
8 assessment statements for up to five (5) pieces of proposed legislation in the senate; and the Rhode
9 Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian-American and Pacific Islander Caucus (RIBLIA) may
10 request equity impact statements for up to five (5) pieces of proposed legislation in the house and
11 up to five (5) pieces of proposed legislation in the senate.

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

15 **22-20-4. Responsibility to produce equity impact statements.**

16 (a) Requests for equity impact statements shall be sent to the Commission on Health
17 Advocacy & Equity (CHAE), established pursuant to chapter 64.1 of title 23. The CHAE shall
18 coordinate with whichever state agencies possess subject matter expertise for the proposed
19 legislation. The CHAE shall be responsible for producing equity impact statements.

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

23 (c) The CHAE may seek expertise or assistance from Rhode Island colleges or universities
24 to provide information or otherwise help produce equity impact statements.

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

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

30 (f) Equity impact statements shall be deemed public records under the provisions of chapter
31 2 of title 38.

32 **22-20-5. Content of equity impact statements.**

33 (a) Where possible, equity impact statements shall include data as to historical and/or
34 existing disparities and as to likely demographic impacts of proposed legislation; such data could

1 include, but not be limited to, differential healthcare outcomes, graduation rates, incarceration rates,
2 or siting of pollution-producing businesses.

3 (b) Where possible, equity impact statements shall include data as to historical and/or
4 existing economic disparities and as to likely fiscal and/or economic impacts of proposed
5 legislation. The data could include, but not be limited to, differential support for minority-owned
6 businesses or for businesses owned by individuals with disabilities.

7 (c) For any particularly protected category, the equity impact statements should include a
8 conclusion as to whether the proposed legislation is likely to increase equity, likely to decrease
9 equity, or likely to have no effect on equity.

10 **22-20-6. Responsibility to complete pilot program for equity impact statements.**

11 The CHAE shall be empowered to:

12 (1) Oversee the pilot program for equity impact statements as established in § 22-20-3.
13 (2) Issue a report with recommendations to speaker of the house, the president of the senate,
14 and the general assembly.

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

17 **35-3-3. Responsibility of budget officer for budget.**

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

21 (b) The budget officer shall, under the supervision of the governor, include in the annual
22 state budget an explanation of the manner in which provisions of the budget further the governor's
23 efforts to ensure equity in the state. For purposes of this section, "equity" means efforts, regulations,
24 policies, programs, standards, processes, and any other functions of government or principles of
25 law and governance intended to: identify and remedy past and present patterns of discrimination or
26 inequality against and disparities in outcome for any class protected in §28-5-7(1)(i); ensure that
27 such patterns of discrimination, inequality, and disparities in outcome, whether intentional or
28 unintentional, are neither reinforced nor perpetuated; and prevent the emergence and persistence of
29 foreseeable future patterns of discrimination against or disparities in outcome for any class
30 protected in §28-5-7(1)(i).

31 **35-3-4. Estimates submitted by department heads.**

32 (a) On dates determined by the budget officer, but not later than the first day of October in
33 each year, each head of a department of the state government, not including the general assembly
34 or the judiciary, shall assemble, correlate, and revise, with power to increase or decrease, the

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

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

18 (c) The estimates shall also include a supplemental presentation identifying which
19 departmental programs and expenditures, ongoing or newly proposed, increase equity. For
20 purposes of this section, "equity" means efforts, regulations, policies, programs, standards,
21 processes and any other functions of government or principles of law and governance intended to:
22 identify and remedy past and present patterns of discrimination or inequality against and disparities
23 in outcome for any class protected in §28-5-7(1)(i); ensure that such patterns of discrimination,
24 inequality and disparities in outcome, whether intentional or unintentional, are neither reinforced
25 nor perpetuated; and prevent the emergence and persistence of foreseeable future patterns of
26 discrimination against or disparities in outcome for any class protected in §28-5-7(1)(i).

27 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

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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

1 This act would establish a two (2)-year pilot program, from January 2027 to December
2 2028, to incorporate equity impact statements into the legislative process for both the house and
3 senate chamber. This act would limit requests for equity impact statements to twenty (20)
4 statements per legislative session. The speaker of the house and the president of the senate would
5 each be allowed to request up to five (5) statements, while the leadership of the Rhode Island Black,
6 Latino, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander (RIBLIA) Caucus are permitted to request
7 up to five (5) statements in the house and five (5) statements in the senate. The Commission on
8 Health Equity and Advocacy (CHAE), in coordination with the legislative council, institutions of
9 higher education, and relevant state agencies, shall produce the requested equity impact statements.
10 The legislative council shall oversee the formatting of Equity Impact Statements and attach
11 statements to bills.

12 This act would also require the state's budget officer, under the supervision of the governor,
13 to provide along with the governor's annual recommended budget an explanation as to the ways
14 the governor's annual recommended budget ensures equity for subgroups of the population
15 identified in §28-5-7(1)(i) concerning Rhode Island's fair employment practices. The estimates
16 shall also include a supplemental presentation identifying which departmental programs and
17 expenditures, ongoing or newly proposed, increase equity.

18 This act would take effect on July 1, 2026.

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