

2021 -- H 5262

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

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A N A C T

RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES  
AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Introduced By: Representatives Vella-Wilkinson, Williams, Noret, Kazarian, and  
Ackerman

Date Introduced: January 29, 2021

Referred To: House Labor

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 28-5-6 and 28-5-7 of the General Laws in Chapter 28-5 entitled  
2 "Fair Employment Practices" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **28-5-6. Definitions.**

4 When used in this chapter:

5 (1) "Age" means anyone who is at least forty (40) years of age.

6 (2) "Because of sex" or "on the basis of sex" include, but are not limited to, because of or  
7 on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, and women affected by  
8 pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions shall be treated the same for all employment  
9 related purposes, including receipt of benefits under fringe benefit programs, as other persons not  
10 so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work, and nothing in this chapter shall be  
11 interpreted to permit otherwise.

12 (3) "Commission" means the Rhode Island commission ~~against discrimination~~ [for human](#)  
13 [rights](#) created by this chapter.

14 (4) "Conviction" means, for the purposes of this chapter only, any verdict or finding of  
15 guilt after a criminal trial or any plea of guilty or nolo contendere to a criminal charge.

16 (5) "Disability" means a disability as defined in § 42-87-1.

17 (6) "Discriminate" includes segregate or separate.

18 (7) "Employee" ~~does not include any individual employed by his or her parents, spouse, or~~

1 ~~child, or in the domestic service of any person~~ means an individual employed by an employer, and  
2 shall include any person elected to state public office or any political subdivision thereof.

3 (i) "Employee" does not include any individual employed by his or her parents, spouse, or  
4 child.

5 (ii) "Employee" includes apprentices, volunteers, and unpaid interns and pages.

6 (8)(i) "Employer" includes the state and all political subdivisions of the state, including all  
7 state and municipal legislative branches, and any person in this state employing four (4) or more  
8 individuals, and any person acting in the interest of an employer directly or indirectly.

9 (ii) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to apply to a religious corporation,  
10 association, educational institution, or society with respect to the employment of individuals of its  
11 religion to perform work connected with the carrying on of its activities; nor shall it be construed  
12 to restrict, diminish or otherwise affect the protections accorded to members of the general  
13 assembly under Article VI, Section 5 of the Rhode Island Constitution.

14 (9) "Employment agency" includes any person undertaking with or without compensation  
15 to procure opportunities to work, or to procure, recruit, refer, or place employees.

16 (10) "Firefighter" means an employee the duties of whose position includes work  
17 connected with the control and extinguishment of fires or the maintenance and use of firefighting  
18 apparatus and equipment, including an employee engaged in this activity who is transferred or  
19 promoted to a supervisory or administrative position.

20 (11) "Gender identity or expression" includes a person's actual or perceived gender, as well  
21 as a person's gender identity, gender-related self image, gender-related appearance, or gender-  
22 related expression; whether or not that gender identity, gender-related self image, gender-related  
23 appearance, or gender-related expression is different from that traditionally associated with the  
24 person's sex at birth.

25 (12) "Labor organization" includes any organization which exists for the purpose, in whole  
26 or in part, of collective bargaining or of dealing with employers concerning grievances, terms or  
27 conditions of employment, or of other mutual aid or protection in relation to employment.

28 (13) "Law enforcement officer" means an employee the duties of whose position include  
29 investigation, apprehension, or detention of individuals suspected or convicted of offenses against  
30 the criminal laws of the state, including an employee engaged in such activity who is transferred or  
31 promoted to a supervisory or administrative position. For the purpose of this subdivision,  
32 "detention" includes the duties of employees assigned to guard individuals incarcerated in any penal  
33 institution.

34 (14) "Person" includes one or more individuals, partnerships, associations, organizations,

1 corporations, legal representatives, trustees, trustees in bankruptcy, or receivers.

2 (15) "Religion" includes all aspects of religious observance and practice, as well as belief,  
3 unless an employer, union or employment agency demonstrates that it is unable to reasonably  
4 accommodate to an employee's or prospective employee's or union member's religious observance  
5 or practice without undue hardship on the conduct of its business.

6 (16) "Sexual orientation" means having or being perceived as having an orientation for  
7 heterosexuality, bisexuality, or homosexuality. This definition is intended to describe the status of  
8 persons and does not render lawful any conduct prohibited by the criminal laws of this state nor  
9 impose any duty on a religious organization. This definition does not confer legislative approval of  
10 that status, but is intended to assure the basic human rights of persons to obtain and hold  
11 employment, regardless of that status.

12 (17) The terms, as used regarding persons with disabilities:

13 (i) "Auxiliary aids and services" and "reasonable accommodation" shall have the same  
14 meaning as those items are defined in § 42-87-1.1; and

15 (ii) "Hardship" means an "undue hardship" as defined in § 42-87-1.1.

16 **28-5-7. Unlawful employment practices.**

17 It shall be an unlawful employment practice:

18 (1) For any employer:

19 (i) To refuse to hire any applicant for employment because of his or her race or color,  
20 religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of  
21 ancestral origin;

22 (ii) Because of those reasons, to discharge an employee or discriminate against him or her  
23 with respect to hire, tenure, compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment, or any  
24 other matter directly or indirectly related to employment. However, if an insurer or employer  
25 extends insurance related benefits to persons other than or in addition to the named employee,  
26 nothing in this subdivision shall require those benefits to be offered to unmarried partners of named  
27 employees;

28 (iii) In the recruiting of individuals for employment or in hiring them, to utilize any  
29 employment agency, placement service, training school or center, labor organization, or any other  
30 employee referring source which the employer knows, or has reasonable cause to know,  
31 discriminates against individuals because of their race or color, religion, sex, sexual orientation,  
32 gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin;

33 (iv) To refuse to reasonably accommodate an employee's or prospective employee's  
34 disability unless the employer can demonstrate that the accommodation would pose a hardship on

1 the employer's program, enterprise, or business; or

2 (v) When an employee has presented to the employer an internal complaint alleging  
3 harassment in the workplace on the basis of race or color, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual  
4 orientation, gender identity or expression, or country of ancestral origin, to refuse to disclose in a  
5 timely manner in writing to that employee the disposition of the complaint, including a description  
6 of any action taken in resolution of the complaint; provided, however, no other personnel  
7 information shall be disclosed to the complainant;

8 (2)(i) For any employment agency to fail or refuse to properly classify or refer for  
9 employment or otherwise discriminate against any individual because of his or her race or color,  
10 religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of  
11 ancestral origin; or

12 (ii) For any employment agency, placement service, training school or center, labor  
13 organization, or any other employee referring source to comply with an employer's request for the  
14 referral of job applicants if the request indicates either directly or indirectly that the employer will  
15 not afford full and equal employment opportunities to individuals regardless of their race or color,  
16 religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of  
17 ancestral origin;

18 (3) For any labor organization:

19 (i) To deny full and equal membership rights to any applicant for membership because of  
20 his or her race or color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability,  
21 age, or country of ancestral origin;

22 (ii) Because of those reasons, to deny a member full and equal membership rights, expel  
23 him or her from membership, or otherwise discriminate in any manner against him or her with  
24 respect to his or her hire, tenure, compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment, or  
25 any other matter directly or indirectly related to membership or employment, whether or not  
26 authorized or required by the constitution or bylaws of the labor organization or by a collective  
27 labor agreement or other contract;

28 (iii) To fail or refuse to classify properly or refer for employment, or otherwise to  
29 discriminate against any member because of his or her race or color, religion, sex, sexual  
30 orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin; or

31 (iv) To refuse to reasonably accommodate a member's or prospective member's disability  
32 unless the labor organization can demonstrate that the accommodation would pose a hardship on  
33 the labor organization's program, enterprise, or business;

34 (4) Except where based on a bona fide occupational qualification certified by the

1 commission or where necessary to comply with any federal mandated affirmative action programs,  
2 for any employer or employment agency, labor organization, placement service, training school or  
3 center, or any other employee referring source, prior to employment or admission to membership  
4 of any individual, to:

5 (i) Elicit or attempt to elicit any information directly or indirectly pertaining to his or her  
6 race or color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or  
7 country of ancestral origin;

8 (ii) Make or keep a record of his or her race or color, religion, sex, sexual orientation,  
9 gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin;

10 (iii) Use any form of application for employment, or personnel or membership blank  
11 containing questions or entries directly or indirectly pertaining to race or color, religion, sex, sexual  
12 orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin;

13 (iv) Print or publish or cause to be printed or published any notice or advertisement relating  
14 to employment or membership indicating any preference, limitation, specification, or  
15 discrimination based upon race or color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or  
16 expression, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin; or

17 (v) Establish, announce, or follow a policy of denying or limiting, through a quota system  
18 or otherwise, employment or membership opportunities of any group because of the race or color,  
19 religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age, or country of  
20 ancestral origin of that group;

21 (5) For any employer or employment agency, labor organization, placement service,  
22 training school or center, or any other employee referring source to discriminate in any manner  
23 against any individual because he or she has opposed any practice forbidden by this chapter, or  
24 because he or she has made a charge, testified, or assisted in any manner in any investigation,  
25 proceeding, or hearing under this chapter;

26 (6) For any person, whether or not an employer, employment agency, labor organization,  
27 or employee, [to directly or indirectly commit any act declared by this section to be an unlawful](#)  
28 [employment practice, or](#) to aid, abet, incite, compel, or coerce the doing of any act declared by this  
29 section to be an unlawful employment practice, or to obstruct or prevent any person from  
30 complying with the provisions of this chapter or any order issued pursuant to this chapter, or to  
31 attempt directly or indirectly to commit any act declared by this section to be an unlawful  
32 employment practice [it being the legislative intent that individuals may be held personally liable](#)  
33 [for such conduct, including, but not limited to, employees or employers;](#)

34 (7) For any employer to include on any application for employment, except applications

1 for law enforcement agency positions or positions related to law enforcement agencies, a question  
2 inquiring or to otherwise inquire either orally or in writing whether the applicant has ever been  
3 arrested, charged with or convicted of any crime; provided, that:

4 (i) If a federal or state law or regulation creates a mandatory or presumptive disqualification  
5 from employment based on a person's conviction of one or more specified criminal offenses, an  
6 employer may include a question or otherwise inquire whether the applicant has ever been  
7 convicted of any of those offenses; or

8 (ii) If a standard fidelity bond or an equivalent bond is required for the position for which  
9 the applicant is seeking employment and his or her conviction of one or more specified criminal  
10 offenses would disqualify the applicant from obtaining such a bond, an employer may include a  
11 question or otherwise inquire whether the applicant has ever been convicted of any of those  
12 offenses; and

13 (iii) Notwithstanding, any employer may ask an applicant for information about his or her  
14 criminal convictions at the first interview or thereafter, in accordance with all applicable state and  
15 federal laws;

16 (8)(i) For any person who, on June 7, 1988, is providing either by direct payment or by  
17 making contributions to a fringe benefit fund or insurance program, benefits in violation with §§  
18 28-5-6, 28-5-7 and 28-5-38, until the expiration of a period of one year from June 7, 1988 or if  
19 there is an applicable collective bargaining agreement in effect on June 7, 1988, until the  
20 termination of that agreement, in order to come into compliance with §§ 28-5-6, 28-5-7 and 28-5-  
21 38, to reduce the benefits or the compensation provided any employee on June 7, 1988, either  
22 directly or by failing to provide sufficient contributions to a fringe benefit fund or insurance  
23 program.

24 (ii) Where the costs of these benefits on June 7, 1988 are apportioned between employers  
25 and employees, the payments or contributions required to comply with §§ 28-5-6, 28-5-7 and 28-  
26 5-38 may be made by employers and employees in the same proportion.

27 (iii) Nothing in this section shall prevent the readjustment of benefits or compensation for  
28 reasons unrelated to compliance with §§ 28-5-6, 28-5-7 and 28-5-38.

29 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 -- FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES  
AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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- 1           This act would make the fair employment practices act expressly applicable to individuals
- 2   elected to state public office or any political subdivision of the state and would provide civil
- 3   liability for a person who directly or indirectly violates the chapter.
- 4           This act would take effect upon passage.

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