

2025 -- H 5506

LC001622

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- EMPLOYEES' FREE SPEECH IN
WORKPLACE

Introduced By: Representatives Craven, O'Brien, Shanley, Dawson, Finkelman, Corvese,
and Potter

Date Introduced: February 13, 2025

Referred To: House Labor

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 28 of the General Laws entitled "LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS"

2 is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 6.15

4 EMPLOYEES' FREE SPEECH IN WORKPLACE

5 **28-6.15-1. Employee rights of free speech in the workplace.**

6 (a) As used in this section:

7 (1) "Political matters" means matters relating to elections for political office, political
8 parties, proposals to change legislation, or regulations, unrelated to the employer's business or
9 business activities, and the decision whether to join or support any political party or political, civic,
10 community, fraternal or labor organization; and

11 (2) "Religious matters" means matters relating to religious affiliation and practice and the
12 decision whether to join or support any religious organization or association.

13 (b) Except as provided in subsections (c) and (d) of this section, an employer or the
14 employer's agent, representative or designee may not discharge, discipline or otherwise penalize or
15 threaten to discharge, discipline or otherwise penalize or take any adverse employment action
16 against an employee because of the employee's refusal to:

17 (1) Attend an employer-sponsored meeting with the employer or its agent, representative
18 or designee, the primary purpose of which is to communicate the employer's opinion concerning

1 religious or political matters; or

2 (2) Listen to speech or view communications, including electronic communications, from
3 the employer or its agent, representative or designee, the primary purpose of which is to
4 communicate the employer's opinion concerning religious or political matters.

5 (c) Nothing in this section shall prohibit:

6 (1) An employer or its agent, representative or designee from communicating to its
7 employees, any information that the employer is required by law to communicate, but only to the
8 extent of such legal requirement;

9 (2) An employer or its agent, representative or designee from communicating to its
10 employees, any information that is necessary for such employees to perform their job duties;

11 (3) An institution of higher education, or any agents, representatives or designees of such
12 institution, from meeting with or participating in any communications with its employees that are
13 part of coursework, any symposia or an academic program at such institution;

14 (4) Casual conversations between employees or between an employee and an agent,
15 representative or designee of an employer, provided participation in such conversations is not
16 required; or

17 (5) A requirement that is limited to the employer's managerial and supervisory employees.

18 (d) The provisions of this section shall not apply to a religious corporation, entity,
19 association, educational institution or society that is exempt from the requirements of Title VII of
20 the Civil Rights Act of 1964 pursuant to 42 USC 2000e-1(a) with respect to speech on religious
21 matters to employees, who perform work connected with the activities undertaken by such religious
22 corporation, entity, association, educational institution or society.

23 (e) In any civil action to enforce this section, the court may award a prevailing employee
24 all appropriate relief, including injunctive relief, reinstatement to the employee's former position
25 or an equivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including
26 seniority, to which the employee would otherwise have been eligible, if the violation had not
27 occurred, damages, and reasonable attorneys' fees and costs.

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

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

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WORKPLACE

- 1 This act would protect employees' rights in the workplace concerning political and
- 2 religious matters, by creating a civil action that may provide damages and attorneys' fees.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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