2025 -- H 5506 SUBSTITUTE A

LC001622/SUB A

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religious or political matters; or

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

AN ACT

RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- LABOR RELATIONS ACT -- EMPLOYEE FREE SPEECH RIGHTS

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. Chapter 28-7 of the General Laws entitled "Labor Relations Act" is hereby 2 amended by adding thereto the following section: 3 28-7-50. Employee rights of free speech in the workplace. 4 (a) As used in this section: 5 (1) "Political matters" means topics that are unrelated to the employer's business or business activities, such as subjects relating to elections for political office, political parties, 6 7 proposals to change legislation or regulations which are not directly related to the employer's 8 business, and a decision whether to join or support any political party or political, civic, community, 9 fraternal or labor organization; and 10 (2) "Religious matters" means matters relating to religious affiliation and practice and the 11 decision whether to join or support any religious organization or association. 12 (b) Except as provided in subsections (c) and (d) of this section, an employer or the employer's agent, representative or designee shall not discharge, discipline or otherwise penalize 13 14 or threaten to discharge, discipline or otherwise penalize or take any adverse employment action 15 against an employee because of the employee's refusal to: 16 (1) Attend an employer-sponsored meeting with the employer or its agent, representative or designee, the primary purpose of which is to communicate the employer's opinion concerning 17

communicate the employer's opinion concerning religious or political matters. (c) Nothing in this section shall prohibit: (1) An employer or its agent, representative or designee from communicate employees any information that the employer is required by law to communicate, but or extent of such legal requirement; (2) An employer or its agent, representative or designee from communicate employees any information that is necessary for such employees to perform their job dution (3) An institution of higher education, or any agent, representative or designee institution, from meeting with or participating in any communications with its employee part of coursework, any symposia or an academic program at such institution; or (4) Casual conversations between employees or between an employee and representative or designee of an employer; provided that, participation in such conversation required. (d) The provisions of this section shall not apply to a religious corporation association, educational institution or society that is exempt from the requirements of Ti the Civil Rights Act of 1964 pursuant to 42 USC 2000e-1(a) with respect to speech on matters to employees who perform work connected with the activities undertaken by such corporation, entity, association, educational institution or society. (e) In a civil action to enforce this section, the court may award a prevailing employee equivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including explanation approaches the employee would otherwise have been eligible if the violation had not occur.	1	(2) Listen to speech or view communications, including electronic communications, from
(c) Nothing in this section shall prohibit: (1) An employer or its agent, representative or designee from communication employees any information that the employer is required by law to communicate, but or extent of such legal requirement; (2) An employer or its agent, representative or designee from communication that is necessary for such employees to perform their job dution (3) An institution of higher education, or any agent, representative or designee institution, from meeting with or participating in any communications with its employee part of coursework, any symposia or an academic program at such institution; or (4) Casual conversations between employees or between an employee and representative or designee of an employer; provided that, participation in such conversation required. (d) The provisions of this section shall not apply to a religious corporation association, educational institution or society that is exempt from the requirements of Ti the Civil Rights Act of 1964 pursuant to 42 USC 2000e-1(a) with respect to speech on matters to employees who perform work connected with the activities undertaken by such corporation, entity, association, educational institution or society. (e) In a civil action to enforce this section, the court may award a prevailing employee equivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee benefits, including sequivalent position, back pay and reestablishment of any employee reasonable attorneys' fees and damages. The court shall also aw	2	the employer or its agent, representative or designee, the primary purpose of which is to
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	24	which the employee would otherwise have been eligible if the violation had not occurred, and
SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.	25	damages. The court shall also award a prevailing employee reasonable attorneys' fees and costs.
	26	SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.
		

LC001622/SUB A ======

EXPLANATION

BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

OF

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RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- LABOR RELATIONS ACT -- EMPLOYEE FREE SPEECH RIGHTS

1	This act would protect the rights of employees in the workplace relating to free speech,
2	assembly and religion, as well as attendance at employer-sponsored meetings regarding political or
3	religious matters. Employees so aggrieved by discipline or discharge by the employer would have
4	the right to bring a civil action against the employer seeking equitable relief and/or compensatory
5	damages including attorneys' fees and costs.
5	This act would take effect upon passage.
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