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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- OFFENSES PERTAINING TO SCHOOLS

Introduced By: Representatives Stewart, Cruz, J. Lombardi, Alzate, Shallcross Smith,  
Kislak, Potter, Felix, Kazarian, and Casimiro

Date Introduced: February 28, 2025

Referred To: House Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1           SECTION 1. Section 16-38-1 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-38 entitled "Offenses  
2    Pertaining to Schools [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is  
3    hereby amended to read as follows:

4           **16-38-1. Discrimination because of race or age.**

5           (a) No person shall be excluded from any public school on account of race or color, or for  
6    being over fifteen (15) years of age, nor except by force of some general regulation applicable to  
7    all persons under the same circumstances.

8           (b) Discrimination on the basis of race is prohibited in all public elementary and secondary  
9    schools in the state and in all schools operated by the council on elementary and secondary  
10   education. This prohibition shall apply to employment practices, admissions, curricular programs,  
11   extracurricular activities including athletics, counseling, and any and all other school functions and  
12   activities.

13          (c) For purposes of this section, the term:

14          (1) "Protective hairstyles" means and includes, but is not limited to, hair texture or  
15    hairstyles, if that hair texture or that hairstyle is commonly associated with a particular race or  
16    national origin (including a hairstyle in which hair is tightly coiled or tightly curled, locks,  
17    cornrows, twists, braids, Bantu knots, and Afros).

18          (2) "Race" means and includes traits historically associated with the race, including, but  
19    not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles.

1 SECTION 2. Section 28-5-6 of the General Laws in Chapter 28-5 entitled "Fair  
2 Employment Practices" is 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" includes, but is 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 created by  
13 this chapter.

14 (4) "Confidential" means to remain secret and not to be disclosed to another person or  
15 entity.

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

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

19 (7) "Discriminate" includes segregate or separate.

20 (8) "Employee" does not include any individual employed by his or her parents, spouse, or  
21 child, or in the domestic service of any person.

22 (9)(i) "Employer" includes the state and all political subdivisions of the state and any  
23 person in this state employing four (4) or more individuals, and any person acting in the interest of  
24 an employer directly or indirectly.

25 (ii) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to apply to a religious corporation,  
26 association, educational institution, or society with respect to the employment of individuals of its  
27 religion to perform work connected with the carrying on of its activities.

28 (10) "Employment agency" includes any person undertaking, with or without  
29 compensation, to procure opportunities to work, or to procure, recruit, refer, or place employees.

30 (11) "Firefighter" means an employee the duties of whose position include work connected  
31 with the control and extinguishment of fires or the maintenance and use of firefighting apparatus  
32 and equipment, including an employee engaged in this activity who is transferred or promoted to a  
33 supervisory or administrative position.

34 (12) "Gender identity or expression" includes a person's actual or perceived gender, as

1 well as a person’s gender identity, gender-related self image, gender-related appearance, or gender-  
2 related expression; whether or not that gender identity, gender-related self image, gender-related  
3 appearance, or gender-related expression is different from that traditionally associated with the  
4 person’s sex at birth.

5 (13) “Labor organization” includes any organization that exists for the purpose, in whole  
6 or in part, of collective bargaining or of dealing with employers concerning grievances, terms or  
7 conditions of employment, or of other mutual aid or protection in relation to employment.

8 (14) “Law enforcement officer” means an employee the duties of whose position include  
9 investigation, apprehension, or detention of individuals suspected or convicted of offenses against  
10 the criminal laws of the state, including an employee engaged in such activity who is transferred or  
11 promoted to a supervisory or administrative position. For the purpose of this subdivision,  
12 “detention” includes the duties of employees assigned to guard individuals incarcerated in any  
13 penal institution.

14 (15) “Non-disparagement agreement” means an agreement which restricts an individual  
15 from taking any action to include, but not be limited to, speaking or publicizing information that  
16 negatively impacts the other party to the agreement to include the reputation, products, services,  
17 employees, and management of the protected party.

18 (16) “Person” includes one or more individuals, partnerships, associations, organizations,  
19 corporations, legal representatives, trustees, trustees in bankruptcy, or receivers.

20 (17) "Protective hairstyles" means and includes, but is not limited to, hair texture or  
21 hairstyles, if that hair texture or that hairstyle is commonly associated with a particular race or  
22 national origin (including a hairstyle in which hair is tightly coiled or tightly curled, locks,  
23 cornrows, twists, braids, Bantu knots, and Afros).

24 (18) "Race" means and includes traits historically associated with the race, including, but  
25 not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles.

26 ~~(17)~~(19) “Religion” includes all aspects of religious observance and practice, as well as  
27 belief, unless an employer, union, or employment agency demonstrates that it is unable to  
28 reasonably accommodate to an employee’s or prospective employee’s or union member’s religious  
29 observance or practice without undue hardship on the conduct of its business.

30 ~~(18)~~(20) “Sexual orientation” means having or being perceived as having an orientation for  
31 heterosexuality, bisexuality, or homosexuality.

32 ~~(19)~~(21) The terms, as used regarding persons with disabilities:

33 (i) “Auxiliary aids and services” and “reasonable accommodation” shall have the same  
34 meaning as those items are defined in § 42-87-1.1; and

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

2 SECTION 3. Section 42-112-1 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-112 entitled "The Civil  
3 Rights Act of 1990" is hereby amended to read as follows:

4 **42-112-1. Discrimination prohibited.**

5 (a) All persons within the state, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, disability, age, or  
6 country of ancestral origin, have, except as is otherwise provided or permitted by law, the same  
7 rights to make and enforce contracts, to inherit, purchase, to lease, sell, hold, and convey real and  
8 personal property, to sue, be parties, give evidence, and to the full and equal benefit of all laws and  
9 proceedings for the security of persons and property, and are subject to like punishment, pains,  
10 penalties, taxes, licenses, and exactions of every kind, and to no other.

11 (b) For the purposes of this section, the right to "make and enforce contracts, to inherit,  
12 purchase, to lease, sell, hold, and convey real and personal property" includes the making,  
13 performance, modification and termination of contracts and rights concerning real or personal  
14 property, and the enjoyment of all benefits, terms, and conditions of the contractual and other  
15 relationships.

16 (c) Nothing contained in this chapter shall be construed to affect chapter 14.1 of title 37,  
17 chapter 5.1 of title 28, or any other remedial programs designed to address past societal  
18 discrimination.

19 (d) For the purposes of this section, the terms "sex" and "age" have the same meaning as  
20 those terms are defined in § 28-5-6, the state fair employment practices act. The term "disability"  
21 has the same meaning as that term is defined in § 42-87-1, and the terms, as used regarding persons  
22 with disabilities, "auxiliary aids and services," "readily achievable," "reasonable accommodation,"  
23 "reasonable modification," and "undue hardship" shall have the same meaning as those terms are  
24 defined in § 42-87-1.1.

25 (e) For the purposes of this section, the term:

26 (1) "Protective hairstyles" means and includes, but is not limited to, hair texture or  
27 hairstyles, if that hair texture or that hairstyle is commonly associated with a particular race or  
28 national origin (including a hairstyle in which hair is tightly coiled or tightly curled, locks,  
29 cornrows, twists, braids, Bantu knots, and Afros).

30 (2) "Race" means and includes traits historically associated with race, including, but not  
31 limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles.

32 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

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RELATING TO EDUCATION -- OFFENSES PERTAINING TO SCHOOLS

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1           This act would prohibit discrimination on the basis of race by expanding the definition of  
2 race to include traits historically associated with race, including, but not limited to, hair texture and  
3 protective hairstyles.

4           This act would take effect upon passage.

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