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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

**RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- THE RHODE ISLAND
COMMUNITY PROTECTION ACT**

Introduced By: Representatives Felix, J. Lombardi, Morales, Potter, Cruz, Giraldo, Alzate, Diaz, Craven, and Speakman

Date Introduced: January 21, 2026

Referred To: House Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 **SECTION 1. Findings**

2 The General Assembly finds and declares:

3 (a) That the routine use of facial coverings by law enforcement officers has significant
4 implications for public perception, officer-community interactions, and accountability.

5 (b) Whether intended or not, members of the public may experience fear or intimidation
6 when approached by officers whose faces are obscured. This perception can heighten defensive
7 behaviors and unnecessarily escalate situations.

8 (c) Facial coverings limit the visibility of facial expressions, which are essential
9 components of nonverbal communication. In high-stress or emotionally charged interactions, the
10 inability to read an officer's expression may lead to misinterpretation of tone or intent, increasing
11 the risk of conflict escalation.

12 (d) The visibility of an officer's face is vital for promoting transparency, facilitating
13 communication, and building trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they
14 serve.

15 (e) When officers are not readily identifiable, it increases the risk of impersonation by
16 unauthorized individuals, which further undermines public trust, endangers public safety, and
17 hinders legitimate law enforcement operations.

18 (f) The use of facial coverings by law enforcement should not obscure officer identity or

1 hinder accountability, nor should those coverings be used in a manner that enables or conceals
2 discriminatory or unlawful conduct.

3 SECTION 2. Title 42 of the General Laws entitled "STATE AFFAIRS AND
4 GOVERNMENT" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

5 CHAPTER 169

6 THE RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITY PROTECTION ACT

7 **42-169-1. Title.**

8 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "The Rhode Island Community
9 Protection Act."

10 **42-169-2. Definitions.**

11 For the purposes of this chapter, the following words and terms shall have the following
12 meanings:

13 (1) "Law enforcement officer" means any of the following:

14 (i) Any person described under § 42-28.6-1;

15 (ii) Any person employed by a law enforcement agency of another state; or

16 (iii) Any person employed by a federal law enforcement agency.

17 (2) "Mask" means a covering of all or part of the face worn as a disguise or to conceal the
18 identity of the person wearing the covering.

19 **42-169-3. Masks and disguises prohibited.**

20 (a) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, a law enforcement officer shall not
21 wear any mask or personal disguise while interacting with the public in the performance of their
22 duties, except for medical grade masks that are surgical or N95 respirators designed and as needed
23 to prevent the transmission of airborne diseases, masks designed and as needed to protect against
24 exposure to smoke during a fire involved situation, masks necessary to perform duties during a
25 water rescue operation, masks related to protection against exposure to biological or chemical
26 agents during an incident where such agents may be present, or masks designed and as needed to
27 protect against exposure to cold during a declared weather emergency.

28 (b) This subsection shall not apply to:

29 (1) Special weapons and tactics ("SWAT") team officers utilizing gear necessary to protect
30 their faces from physical harm while they perform their SWAT responsibilities;

31 (2) Law enforcement officers engaged in high-risk situations including, but not limited to,
32 a shootout, standoff, hostage-taking situation, or terrorist situation, where a mask provides physical
33 protection to the face; or

34 (3) Law enforcement officers engaged in an undercover assignment in the regular

1 performance of their official duties.

2 **42-169-4. Identification required.**

3 (a) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, law enforcement officers shall wear
4 appropriate identification while interacting with the public in the performance of their duties, which
5 shall include:

6 (1) The law enforcement officer's name or badge number; and
7 (2) The full name or initials of the law enforcement officer's employing law enforcement
8 agency.

9 (b) This subsection shall not apply when a law enforcement officer is engaged in an
10 undercover assignment in the regular performance of their official duties.

11 **42-169-5. Criminal liability.**

12 Any person violating the provisions of § 42-169-3 or § 42-169-4 shall be imprisoned not
13 exceeding one year or fined not exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1,000), or both.

14 **42-169-6. Civil liability.**

15 Notwithstanding any other law, any person who is found to have committed an assault,
16 battery, false imprisonment, false arrest, abuse of process, or malicious prosecution, while wearing
17 a mask or disguise in a knowing and willful violation of this chapter shall not be entitled to assert
18 any privilege or immunity for their tortious conduct against a claim of civil liability, and shall be
19 liable to that individual for the greater of actual damages or statutory damages of not less than ten
20 thousand dollars (\$10,000), whichever is greater.

21 **42-169-7. Severability.**

22 The provisions of this chapter are severable. If any provision of this chapter or its
23 application is held invalid, that invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications that shall
24 be given effect without the invalid provision or application.

25 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- THE RHODE ISLAND
COMMUNITY PROTECTION ACT

- 1 This act would bar law enforcement from wearing masks or disguises when interacting with the public, require visible ID, allow limited safety and undercover exceptions, and impose criminal penalties and civil liability for violations.
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- 3
- 4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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