

2026 -- H 8331

LC003730

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- THE TRADES WORKER JUSTICE
AND SAFETY ACT

Introduced By: Representatives Morales, Potter, Voas, Cruz, and Tanzi

Date Introduced: March 20, 2026

Referred To: House Labor

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings.

2 The General Assembly finds and declares:

3 (1) All construction workers have the right to a workplace free from harassment,
4 discrimination, intimidation, bullying, abuse, and retaliation.

5 (2) Women, tradeswomen, workers of color, LGBTQ+ workers, immigrants, and other
6 marginalized groups experience disproportionate rates of job-site hostility and workplace violence.

7 (3) The tragic death of Yinka A. Awodumila, a laborer in Rhode Island, demonstrates
8 systemic failures in responding to hostile job sites, retaliation, and worker mental health crises.

9 (4) Rhode Island must establish comprehensive, enforceable protections that ensure no
10 worker's plea for safety is ignored and that every worker is given dignity, protection, and respect.

11 (5) These protections shall cover all construction sites including private projects, public
12 projects, municipal and city-funded projects, school district projects, state-funded projects,
13 federally funded projects, and any project permitted, contracted, or overseen by the Rhode Island
14 Department of Labor and Training (RIDLT), the Rhode Island Department of Transportation
15 (RIDOT), or any other state agency.

16 (6) A statewide system utilizing "Safe From Hate" best practices, independent oversight,
17 mental health protections, women's restroom standards, whistleblower protections, and zero-
18 tolerance harassment policies is essential to the safety and dignity of construction workers.

1 (7) A neutral, worker-first Ombudsman is necessary to ensure accountability free from
2 union, contractor, employer, or agency interference.

3 SECTION 2. Title 28 of the General Laws entitled "LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS"
4 is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

5 CHAPTER 61

6 THE TRADES WORKER JUSTICE AND SAFETY ACT

7 **28-61-1. Definitions.**

8 For purposes of this chapter:

9 (1) "Construction site" means any location within Rhode Island where construction,
10 demolition, alteration, excavation, highway or bridge work, utility work, or related labor occurs
11 including, but not limited to:

12 (i) Private construction sites;

13 (ii) Public construction sites;

14 (iii) Municipal or city-funded projects;

15 (iv) State-funded projects;

16 (v) Federally funded or federally assisted projects;

17 (vi) School district, university, or public agency projects;

18 (vii) Any site governed, contracted, permitted, or overseen by the Rhode Island department
19 of labor and training (RIDLT);

20 (viii) Any site governed, contracted, permitted, or overseen by the Rhode Island department
21 of transportation (RIDOT); and

22 (ix) Any site regulated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or
23 any state licensing authority.

24 (2) "Harassment or bullying" means unwelcome verbal, physical, visual, written, or digital
25 conduct that creates a hostile, intimidating, discriminatory, humiliating, retaliatory, or offensive
26 work environment including, but not limited to:

27 (i) Gender-based harassment;

28 (ii) Sexual harassment;

29 (iii) Racial or ethnic harassment;

30 (iv) Threats, slurs, intimidation, or sabotage; and

31 (v) Retaliation for reporting safety or misconduct.

32 (3) "Whistleblower" means a worker who reports unsafe conditions, discrimination,
33 harassment, fraud, retaliation, wage violations, misconduct, violence, or mental-health-related
34 concerns.

1 (4) "Ombudsman" means a neutral, state-appointed official empowered to receive,
2 investigate, and resolve worker concerns independently from unions, contractors, employers, or
3 agencies.

4 **28-61-2. Safe and equitable facilities mandate.**

5 (a) All construction sites shall provide regulated, dedicated women's restrooms that are:

6 (1) Separate, private, fully enclosed, and lockable;

7 (2) Sanitary and clearly labeled;

8 (3) Maintained daily with cleaning logs;

9 (4) Equipped with functioning locks, proper lighting, menstrual products, and covered trash
10 receptacles; and

11 (5) Located within a reasonable distance of the work area.

12 (b) Inspections of construction sites to verify compliance with subsection (a) of this section
13 shall be conducted at least once every thirty (30) days by one or more of the following entities:

14 (1) RIDLT;

15 (2) RIDOT;

16 (3) OSHA;

17 (4) The ombudsman's office; or

18 (5) Municipal inspectors.

19 (c) Failure to comply with subsection (a) of this section shall result in:

20 (1) Mandatory fines;

21 (2) Written corrective action plans; and

22 (3) Stop-work orders for repeat violations.

23 **28-61-3. Zero-tolerance jobsite harassment standard.**

24 (a) The following conduct is prohibited on all construction sites:

25 (1) Sexual harassment;

26 (2) Gender-based harassment;

27 (3) Bullying or intimidation;

28 (4) Racial, ethnic, or religious harassment;

29 (5) Threats, slurs, or degrading remarks;

30 (6) Tool sabotage or work sabotage; and

31 (7) Retaliation of any kind.

32 (b) Any individual who engages in prohibited conduct under subsection (a) of this section
33 shall be immediately removed from the job site pending investigation.

34 (c) Incidents of prohibited conduct must be reported to:

- 1 (1) The employer;
- 2 (2) RIDLT;
- 3 (3) RIDOT (if the project is under RIDOT jurisdiction); and
- 4 (4) The ombudsman.
- 5 (d) Failure to report incidents as required under subsection (c) of this section shall result in
- 6 employer penalties.

7 (e) The director of RIDLT shall promulgate rules and regulations relative to the prohibited
8 conduct under this section and what constitutes a violation thereof.

9 **28-61-4. Whistleblower protection and non-retaliation.**

10 (a) Whistleblower protections under this chapter shall be undeniable and non-waivable.

11 (b) Protected activities include reporting on the following:

- 12 (1) Hazards;
- 13 (2) Harassment or bullying;
- 14 (3) Discrimination;
- 15 (4) Mental health emergencies;
- 16 (5) Violence or threats; and
- 17 (6) Wrongdoing by supervisors, contractors, or union officials.

18 (c) Retaliation against whistleblowers is prohibited including, but not limited to:

- 19 (1) Termination, suspension, demotion, or removal from work or committees;
- 20 (2) Blacklisting or removal from future jobs;
- 21 (3) Reduction of hours or overtime;
- 22 (4) Negative evaluations;
- 23 (5) Hostile assignments;
- 24 (6) Threats, intimidation, or slander.

25 (d) Remedies for violations include:

- 26 (1) Reinstatement;
- 27 (2) Treble damages;
- 28 (3) Attorneys' fees; and
- 29 (4) Expedited ombudsman review under this chapter.

30 **28-61-5. "Safe From Hate" compliance standards.**

31 (a) Rhode Island hereby adopts the U.S. Department of Labor's Safe from Hate best
32 practices.

33 (b) All contractors, subcontractors, unions, and employers shall implement:

- 34 (1) Mandatory ongoing anti-harassment training;

- 1 (2) Respect- and safety-based new hire orientation;
2 (3) Posting of worker rights and reporting channels in union halls, contractor offices,
3 jobsite entrances, and other visible locations;
4 (4) Ongoing crew-level safety and mental health check-ins; and
5 (5) Supervisor and leadership accountability for inaction.
6 (c) The requirements of this section apply to all state-funded construction projects, public
7 works, and all contractors and subcontractors bidding on state or RIDOT contracts.

8 **28-61-6. Rhode Island ombudsman for construction worker safety and equity.**

- 9 (a) There is hereby established within RIDLT an independent ombudsman’s office.
10 (b) The ombudsman shall:
11 (1) Receive confidential or anonymous complaints;
12 (2) Investigate harassment, retaliation, and safety concerns;
13 (3) Issue binding corrective recommendations;
14 (4) Require employers or contractors to take corrective action;
15 (5) Refer cases to OSHA, RIDLT, RIDOT, or the attorney general as appropriate;
16 (6) Track statewide patterns of job-site hostility;
17 (7) Publish annual reports (protecting worker identities); and
18 (8) Conduct unannounced jobsite inspections.
19 (c) Workers may contact the ombudsman via:
20 (1) 24/7 hotline;
21 (2) Anonymous text hotline;
22 (3) Online reporting portal;
23 (4) Private on-site interviews.
24 (d) The ombudsman shall not:
25 (1) Be a union member or have an immediate family member in any union;
26 (2) Have worked for a contractor, employer, or union within five (5) years prior to
27 appointment; and
28 (3) Be influenced by employer associations or agency leadership.

29 **28-61-7. Enforcement and penalties.**

- 30 (a) Violators including contractors, subcontractors, employers, or unions shall be subject
31 to enforcement of the provisions of this chapter by the attorney general and/or RIDLT to include,
32 but not be limited to:
33 (1) Fines ranging from five thousand dollars (\$5,000) to fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000)
34 per violation;

- 1 (2) Mandatory corrective action plans;
- 2 (3) Public posting of violations;
- 3 (4) Suspension from eligibility for state and RIDOT contracts; and
- 4 (5) Stop-work orders for severe or repeated violations.
- 5 (b) Supervisors, foremen, stewards, and management who fail to act may face:
- 6 (1) Personal fines;
- 7 (2) Removal from supervisory duties; and
- 8 (3) Criminal referral for willful negligence.

9 **28-61-8. Mental health protections.**

10 Employers shall:

- 11 (1) Provide mental health crisis resource cards listing immediate support options;
- 12 (2) Offer access to employee assistance programs (EAP);
- 13 (3) Immediately contact emergency services when a worker expresses a crisis; and
- 14 (4) Notify the ombudsman of any mental health crisis within twenty-four (24) hours.

15 **28-61-9. Reporting, training, and public transparency.**

16 (a) The ombudsman shall publish on the RIDLT website:

- 17 (1) Annual statewide reports;
- 18 (2) Harassment and retaliation data;
- 19 (3) Women’s restroom compliance records;
- 20 (4) Training completion logs; and
- 21 (5) Contractor compliance scores.

22 (b) Employers shall post at all jobsite entrances:

- 23 (1) Worker rights;
- 24 (2) Zero-tolerance policy;
- 25 (3) Whistleblower protections; and
- 26 (4) Ombudsman contact information.

27 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect on January 1, 2027.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO LABOR AND LABOR RELATIONS -- THE TRADES WORKER JUSTICE
AND SAFETY ACT

1 This act would establish the trades worker justice and safety act to help provide workers
2 with a workplace free from harassment, discrimination, intimidation, bullying, abuse and
3 retaliation.

4 This act would take effect on January 1, 2027.

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