



RIEMA

RHODE ISLAND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Daniel J. McKee, **Governor**
Marc R. Pappas, **Director**

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr., Chair
House Committee on Corporations
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: 2025 - H – 5155, Substitute A, An Act Relating to Businesses and Profession – Architects

2025 – H- 5157 Substitute A, An Act Relating to Military Affairs and Defense – Emergency
Management

Dear Chair Solomon:

The Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency strongly supports 2025 -H – 5155, Substitute A and 2025 -H – 5155, Substitute A which clarify that architects and disaster response workers are entitled to all rights in like manner of state employees under R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 28-29 through 28-38 (workers compensation benefits) and R.I. Gen. Laws §9-31-8 (defense of state employee by the attorney general).

Many disaster response workers are physicians, nurses, behavioral health counselors, emergency medical technicians, veterinarians, search and rescue personnel, engineers, and architects who provide volunteer assistance to the state outside of their paid employment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, health care volunteers provided vaccinations and testing services to the public and provided medical support at the Cranston Street Armory. Volunteers assist the Rhode Island State Police SWAT team, provide shelter for animals during fires and floods, and provide advice on structural integrity to damaged buildings. These volunteer professionals are an invaluable State asset. Unfortunately, their professional malpractice insurance does not usually provide coverage for acts that occur outside of paid employment. While R.I. Gen. Laws § 30-15-15 provides these professionals with the defense of statutory immunity for ordinary negligence, they are not provided with counsel to represent them should the need arise. For this reason, some professionals, especially young professionals with educational debt, are reluctant to serve as disaster response workers because they would be responsible for paying their own legal fees or purchasing additional insurance. These bills clarify that architects and other disaster response workers will be provided with legal representation by the attorney general, which would likely result in an increase in volunteerism and better outcomes for individuals impacted by a disaster.

Respectfully,

Marc R. Pappas

cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on Corporations
Honorable Megan Cotter
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House