




To: House Labor Committee
From: James Parisi, Field Representative 
Date: February 12, 2025
Re: **Labor Relations Act – Definition of Employee**
Testimony in **support** of 2025-H 5187 (Corvese et al.)

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals supports H 5187 and appreciates Chair Corvese introducing the bill. There are several changes incorporated in the legislation. Our focus is on the amended definition of employee on pages 2 and 3 of the bill.

This legislation is drafted to specifically provide Rhode Island State Labor Relations Board (RISLRB) coverage for employees not already protected by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The legislation further provides that the definition of employee specifically includes students who are employed as teacher assistants, research assistants and other job classifications.

The ability to organize is challenging for certain groups of workers when job classifications or employment categories are litigated and relitigated by the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRB is the federal agency overseeing private sector labor relations in the USA. Student worker coverage by the NLRB is one such group of workers where union representation has not been consistently recognized over recent years, and that uncertainty may continue once the President appoints new members of the NLRB.

Several different categories of student workers employed by Brown University have organized under my union over the past few years. They are now members of the Graduate Labor Organization (GLO), AFT Local 6516. It is on their behalf that the RIFTHP support the bill.

Having private sector workers organize under the RI State Labor Relations Board is not a new concept. For those interested in history, for decades after its inception in the 1940s, the NLRB did not recognize health care worker unions and did not permit nurses to unionize. Nurses at the old Lying-In hospital in Providence (now Women and Infants Hospital), organized into a union under the RISLRB, not the NLRB, before the NLRB included nurses in the early 1970s.

H 5187 would be beneficial to student workers so that they can maintain union protection notwithstanding changes at the NLRB. Private sector worker coverage by the RISLRB is not a new concept.

The RIFTHP urges passage of H 5187.