

Memo To: House Rules Committee
From: Kelly Nevins, CEO, Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Date: January 15, 2025
Regards: Support of Bill H5010

Women's Fund of Rhode Island's (WFRI) mission is to invest in women and girls through research, advocacy, grantmaking, and strategic partnerships designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. ***We strongly support bill 5010*** which would require up to five bills identified by the Speaker of the House, and/or five bills identified by the Rhode Island Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian American, and Pacific Islander Caucus, to address how these bills would impact protected classes before the bill is heard.

Equity statements are essential tools for legislators to understand the potential impact of their bills on marginalized communities. These statements provide a structured way to assess whether the proposed legislation will advance or hinder equity, ensuring that all communities, especially those historically marginalized, are considered in the policymaking process. These equity statements can be treated with the same importance as a fiscal note on a bill, helping us to understand the true cost of a bill to the communities it might ultimately serve.

By incorporating equity statements, legislators can:

1. **Identify Unintended Consequences:** Equity statements help highlight potential adverse effects on marginalized communities, allowing legislators to address these issues before the bill is passed.
2. **Promote Fairness and Justice:** They ensure that laws and policies are designed to be fair and just, aligning with the values of equity and inclusion.
3. **Enhance Transparency and Accountability:** By making the equity impact of legislation public, equity statements promote transparency and hold legislators accountable for their decisions.

States like Colorado and Connecticut have already implemented equity statements in their legislative processes. For example, Connecticut's Raised Bill No. 414 focuses on equity in state employment, ensuring fair treatment of all individuals, including those from underserved communities. Similarly, Colorado has adopted measures to assess the equity impact of their policies, demonstrating a commitment to addressing systemic disparities.

It would be challenging to identify even one area of public policy where racial, ethnic, gender, or disability equity is irrelevant. This bill will help sponsors to understand the potential impact that their own bills would have on the broader community and may also help to identify allies to strengthen and support these bills.

Please join us in supporting this important piece of legislation, which will ultimately create a better Rhode Island for all who live and work here.