

Senate Labor & Gaming Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

March 25, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of S2171 — Relating to Public Officers and Employees — Merit System

Name: Heather Croteau
Organization: State Employee
Viewpoint: In Support

Dear Chair Burke and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon, Chair Burke and members of the Committee.

I am a state employee working within Rhode Island's merit system, and I submit this testimony in strong support of S2171.

This bill addresses a systemic flaw in how classification decisions are applied. In practice, whether a position directly supervises staff has been used as a threshold requirement for classification upgrades, often overriding the actual scope, complexity, and level of accountability inherent in the role. This approach does not reflect the intent of a merit-based system and has led to inconsistent and inequitable outcomes across agencies.

There are positions throughout state government that carry significant responsibility — including complex decision-making, oversight of high-impact programs and cases, and accountability for outcomes affecting vulnerable populations and public resources — yet are undervalued because they do not conform to a traditional supervisory model. The current framework fails to capture the realities of how this work is performed.

The consequences of this are not theoretical. It affects compensation, creates barriers to recruitment, and undermines retention of experienced staff in roles that are essential to agency function and service delivery. When classification does not align with actual responsibility, it weakens the state's ability to maintain a stable and effective workforce.

S2171 provides a necessary correction by ensuring that classification determinations reflect the totality of a position's duties and responsibilities, rather than reliance on a single limiting factor. This aligns classification practice with the core principles of the merit system and promotes consistency across state government.

I respectfully urge the Committee to advance S2171.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Heather Croteau