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**To:** SLegislation <slegislation@rilegislature.gov>

**Subject:** RI S2171

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Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Gaming,

I am writing this testimony as a NEARI/PSA member and a lifelong Rhode Islander who has worked for the State of Rhode Island since 2018. I support Bill S2171 to remove supervising other employees as a factor for position upgrade eligibility during desk audits, as I believe it would benefit hard-working state employees and improve retention of a skilled and dedicated workforce for the State of Rhode Island.

In my current role, I have participated in analyses of the public health workforce. Across two surveys conducted in 2024 and 2025, lack of opportunities for advancement was cited as an area of very low satisfaction and a top reason staff consider leaving state service. It should thus be a top priority for the state to improve advancement opportunities for staff, and S2171 can help do that.

For state employees, desk audits are the **only** opportunity for merit-based promotions without leaving your current position. As a NEARI/PSA member, the structure of our pay scales happen at pre-established time intervals where one reaches the top of their pay grade within 2.5 years in that role. The options after that point are:

1. Languish at the top of your current grade and rely on annual cost of living adjustments.
2. Desk audit
3. Apply for an entirely new position at a higher pay grade
4. Leave Rhode Island state service for a better position elsewhere.

Given the limited openings for state FTE positions, nevermind managerial roles (which are typically the pathway for #3), without possibility of a desk audit, many hardworking and highly qualified employees would end up choosing #4. When they choose to leave state service, we lose valuable talent and institutional knowledge that could have been retained if it was possible for them to advance in their role without becoming a supervisor.

Additionally, the current language requires supervision of other FTEs, and supervision of contractors does not count. This means that people who supervise contractors are not

eligible for reclassification due to the limitations of state hiring mechanisms, not because of lack of merit or level of responsibility. At my agency, we have hovered at or near our FTE cap for years, so FTE hiring is limited, even when we have funding for it. The opportunity to become a supervisor is thus further limited by the low number of new FTEs being hired at entry level positions. Plus, in any organization, you can only have so many managers, so it just doesn't make sense for so many position types to have a supervisory requirement in today's workforce.

I was fortunate that the classifications in my position type (epidemiologist) were revised a few years ago to remove the supervisory requirement. This allowed me to complete a desk audit so my title and pay could reflect the increase in my skill and responsibility level after 3.5 years in my position. I have colleagues that have worked for the State for many years and have previously been denied reclassification due to the supervisory requirement. They then had to wait years for the stars to align with changes in funding or their team structure for them to become a supervisor. It's unfair that their hard work and years of service did not qualify them for advancement on merit due to an outdated requirement.

It is also essential to note that the desk audit process is not truly a "promotion" but rather an adjustment in classification/pay based on work that an employee is **already doing**. Within the process, an employee must provide detailed evidence that they are already working beyond the scope of their current role and in alignment with the description of a higher classification. While passing this bill would likely result in more applications for desk audits, each person would still go through this process, and would only be reclassified when it is earned based on their work.

This bill is essential for improving advancement pathways for state employees and ensuring that hard-working civil servants have an opportunity to advance based on their own merit, not factors outside their control - like state FTE caps, state hiring mechanisms, their program's funding for additional staff, their team's structure, the type of position they are in, etc.

Thank you,

Katie St. Amand