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Division of Human Resources
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March 25, 2026

The Honorable John P. Burke
Chairperson
Senate Committee on Labor & Gaming
Rhode Island Senate
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: Senate Bill No. 2171 – An Act Relating To Public Officers And Employees -- Merit System-
Classification Plan**

Dear Chairperson Burke,

Thank you for providing the Division of Human Resources (“Division”) within the Department of Administration (“Department”) the opportunity to submit our concerns in response to Senate Bill No. 2171, which amends the Office of Personnel Administration (OPA) desk audit classification rules to eliminate supervising other employees as a factor for position upgrade eligibility.

The core of a strong human resources function in state government is having a classification system that provides fair, clear and consistent career pathways. The State of Rhode Island’s classification structure, which mirrors the general hierarchical structure inherent in all government systems, was built and continues to evolve using that critical lens. The success of such a structure is partly dependent upon the employer’s ability to ensure employees at entry levels of job hierarchies can acquire knowledge, learn core skills, and master capabilities before advancing to higher level positions and eventually transitioning to supervisory and management roles.

Employee reclassification, also known as the “desk audit” process, is a mechanism which could be used to advance an employee to a higher level of compensation if the individual is determined to be conducting the functions of a different classification. This mechanism is in place so employees are fairly compensated for all the job responsibilities they are undertaking at the time of the desk audit request. If an employee is found to be working “out of class” or at a different level, it’s only fair to compensate that individual for those additional requirements they are completing. Many times, those additional requirements include supervision.

If passed, this bill may impact the State’s entire staff hierarchy. Organizational hierarchy is largely determined by differing levels of responsibility, with supervisory roles often acting as a core factor to differentiate between classifications. The desk audit process utilizes existing job classifications and their related requirements. Therefore, this bill would result in having individuals in the same classification (and being compensated at the same level) but holding different levels of responsibility, which is not fair to either employee and flattens the agency’s structure and hierarchy. Employee career development is a vital component to the growth and positive development of each agency of state government. However, removing the supervisory requirement also impedes the ability of agency

March 25, 2026

Page 2

directors to determine the optimal balance of supervisory and rank-and-file employees. This will in turn lead to organizational confusion, inefficiencies, and the potential of service delivery interruptions.

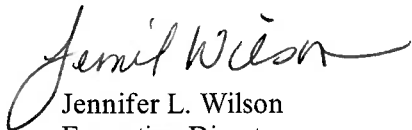
Further, there are already existing pathways that allow agency leaders to create promotional opportunities that include supervisory responsibilities such as posting supervisory level job vacancies and creating new supervisory level classifications via the existing Public Hearings process outlined in the Merit System Act (R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-4).

Through the public hearing process, changes to classifications can be put forward by agency leadership for consideration and is subject to a public vetting process, where members of the public as well as state employees, labor organizations and any stakeholder have the right to submit comments or concerns. The continued utilization of that process would ensure that existing classifications be altered, or new supervisory classes be created, that do not upend agency leaders' ability to preserve workforce balance, which is vital to ensure mission critical control and continuity of services.

This reshuffling of agency staff could also result in significant unfunded budgetary costs as more employees will ascend into the ranks of management without completing supervisory requirements and thus be paid at a higher compensation level that current agency budgets cannot support.

The Division appreciates the opportunity to share our concerns over this legislation with the Committee. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact my office at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Jennifer L. Wilson
Executive Director
Division of Human Resources

cc: The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Labor & Gaming
The Honorable V. Susan Sosnowski
Kristen Silvia, Deputy Chief of Staff and Director of Legislation
Audra Parrillo, Committee Clerk