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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2020

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A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- ESTABLISHING A
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LATINXS

Introduced By: Representative Anastasia P. Williams

Date Introduced: September 24, 2020

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 42 of the General Laws entitled "STATE AFFAIRS AND
2 GOVERNMENT" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 160

4 COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LATINXS

5 **42-160-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Commission on the Status of African
7 Americans and Latinxs."

8 **42-160-2. Creation of commission.**

9 There is hereby created and established a permanent commission to be known as the
10 "Commission on the Status of African Americans and Latinxs", hereinafter referred to as the
11 "commission".

12 **42-160-3. Membership of commission.**

13 (a) There shall be a permanent commission on the status of African Americans and Latinxs.
14 The commission shall consist of eleven (11) members as follows: three (3) persons appointed by
15 the governor from a list of not less than five (5) nominees provided by the Providence branch of
16 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; three (3) persons appointed by
17 the president of the senate from a list of not less than five (5) nominees from the Rhode Island
18 Black & Latino Legislative Caucus (RILBLC); three (3) persons appointed by the speaker of the

1 house of representatives from a list of not less than five (5) nominees provided by the Rhode Island
2 Black and Latino Legislative Caucus; One person appointed by the minority leader of the senate
3 from a list of not less than five (5) nominees from the Providence branch of the National
4 Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Rhode Island Black and Latino
5 Legislative Caucus; and one person appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives
6 from a list of not less than five (5) nominees from the Providence branch of the National
7 Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Rhode Island Black and Latino
8 Legislative Caucus. Members of the commission must be residents of the state who have
9 demonstrated a commitment to the African American and the Latinxs community.

10 (b) Members shall serve terms of three (3) years and until their successors are appointed.
11 Vacancies in the membership of the commission shall be filled by the original appointing authority
12 for the balance of the unexpired term.

13 (c) The commission shall annually elect from among its members a chair, a vice chair, a
14 treasurer and any other officers it considers necessary. The members of the commission shall
15 receive no compensation for their services; provided, however, that members shall be reimbursed
16 for any usual and customary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties.

17 **42-160-4. Purpose and authority.**

18 (a) The commission shall be a resource to the state on issues affecting African Americans
19 and Latinxs. A primary function of the commission shall be to make policy recommendations,
20 based on research and analysis, to the general assembly and executive agencies that:

21 (1) Ensure African Americans and Latinxs equitably benefit from and have access to
22 government services in the same manner as other citizens of the state;

23 (2) Make recommendations to amend laws, policies and practices that have benefited
24 citizens of the state to the exclusion of African Americans and Latinxs; and

25 (3) Promote solutions that address the impact of discrimination against African Americans
26 and Latinxs.

27 (b) The commission shall:

28 (1) Promote research and be a clearinghouse and source of information on issues pertaining
29 to African Americans and Latinxs in the state;

30 (2) Inform the public and leaders of business, education, human services, health care,
31 judiciary, state and local governments and the media of the historical and current implications of
32 systemic racism on the African American and Latinxs community across the state and the unique
33 cultural, social, ethnic, economic and educational issues affecting African Americans and Latinxs
34 in the state;

1 (3) Serve as a liaison between government and private interest groups with regard to
2 matters of unique interest and concern to African Americans and Latinxs in the state;

3 (4) Identify and recommend qualified African Americans and Latinxs for appointive
4 positions at all levels of government, including boards and commissions;

5 (5) Assess programs and practices in all state agencies as they affect African Americans
6 and Latinxs using a racial equity framework;

7 (6) Advise executive agencies and the general assembly on the potential effect on African
8 Americans and Latinxs of proposed legislation and regulations using a racial equity framework;

9 (7) Monitor executive and legislative action purported to eliminate systemic racism for its
10 impact on African Americans and Latinxs using a racial equity framework; and

11 (8) Generally undertake activities designed to enable the state to realize the full benefit of
12 the skills, talents and cultural heritage of African Americans and Latinxs in the state.

13 **42-160-5. Powers of the commission.**

14 (a) The powers of the commission shall include, but not be limited to:

15 (1) Employment of a staff to assist in the performance of its duties;

16 (2) Holding regular, public meetings and fact-finding hearings and other public forums as
17 necessary;

18 (3) Using the voluntary and uncompensated services of private individuals, agencies and
19 organizations that may from time to time be offered and needed, including provision of meeting
20 places and refreshments;

21 (4) Establishing and maintaining offices that it considers necessary, subject to
22 appropriation;

23 (5) Enacting by-laws for its own governance;

24 (6) Contract or collaborate with academic institutions, private sector consultants or other
25 professionals for research and analysis; and

26 (7) Recommending policies and making recommendations to agencies and officers of the
27 state and local subdivisions of government to effectuate the purposes of this chapter.

28 (b) The commission may request information and assistance from state agencies as the
29 commission requires.

30 **42-160-6. Appropriations and disbursements.**

31 For fiscal year 2021 the general assembly shall appropriate the sum of two million dollars
32 (\$2,000,000) to carry out the purpose of this chapter, and shall further annually appropriate, out of
33 any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, a sum sufficient to continue to carry out the
34 purposes of this chapter; and the state controller is hereby authorized and directed to draw his or

1 her orders upon the general treasurer for the payment of that sum, or so much thereof as may be
2 required from time to time, upon the receipt by him or her of properly authenticated vouchers.

3 (b) The commission may additionally accept and solicit funds, including any gifts,
4 donations, grants or bequests or any federal funds for any of the purposes of this chapter.

5 **42-160-7. Commission staff.**

6 The commission staff shall consist of an executive director, employees and consultants and
7 unpaid volunteers who assist the commission in effectuating its statutory purpose. The commission
8 shall appoint the executive director for at term of three (3) years.

9 **42-160-8. Annual report.**

10 Annually, not later than January 2, the commission shall report the results of its findings
11 and activities of the preceding year and its recommendations to the governor and to the president
12 of the senate and the speaker of the house of representatives.

13 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- ESTABLISHING A
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND LATINXS

1 This act would establish a permanent commission on the status of African Americans and
2 Latinxs. The commission's primary function is to make policy recommendations based on research
3 and analysis to ensure African Americans and Latinxs equitably benefit from government services
4 and to address the impact of discrimination against African American and Latinx community
5 members. It would also provide for an appropriation by the general assembly of two million dollars
6 (\$2,000,000) for fiscal year 2021 and additional sufficient annual appropriations to carry out the
7 purpose of this chapter.

8 This act would take effect upon passage.

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