

2016 -- S 2597

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2016

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A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT - PUBLIC CORRUPTION AND  
WHITE COLLAR CRIME UNIT

Introduced By: Senators Lombardi, Archambault, Conley, Algieri, Nesselbush, and  
Pagliarini

Date Introduced: February 25, 2016

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

(Attorney General)

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 9.4

4 PUBLIC CORRUPTION AND WHITE COLLAR CRIME UNIT

5 **42-9.4-1. Legislative findings.** -- The general assembly finds and declares that:

6 (1) Government integrity is the backbone of efficient and effective state and municipal  
7 governments;

8 (2) Abuse of the public trust erodes the public's confidence in public servants, as well as,  
9 undermines the ability of government to work towards the public good;

10 (3) Recent and historical cases of the abuse of public trust has had a negative impact on  
11 the operation of state and municipal government and the state's economy;

12 (4) All citizens of Rhode Island have the right to open, honest and ethical government;

13 (5) The public needs an advocate to ensure that the policy goals and laws established to  
14 protect Rhode Islanders from abuse of the public trust are enforced; and

15 (6) In order to provide a safeguard against abuses of the public trust by public servants,  
16 the general assembly finds it necessary to establish a public corruption and white collar crime unit  
17 within the department of attorney general.

18 **42-9.4-2. Definitions.** -- As used in this chapter:

1 (1) "Abuse of public trust" means any conduct, criminal or unethical in nature, that  
2 deprives the citizens of the state of Rhode Island and its municipalities of a government that  
3 operates in furtherance of the public interest.

4 (2) "Public servant" means:

5 (i) Any full-time or part-time employee in the classified, non-classified or unclassified  
6 service of the state or of any city or town within the state, any individuals serving in any  
7 appointed state or municipal position, any employees of any public or quasi-public state or  
8 municipal board, commission or corporation, and any contractual employees of the state or of any  
9 city or town within the state;

10 (ii) Any officer or member of a state or municipal agency as defined in §36-14-2 who is  
11 appointed for a term of office specified by the constitution or a statute of this state or a charter or  
12 ordinance of any city or town or who is appointed by or through the governing body or highest  
13 official of state or municipal government; or

14 (iii) Any person holding any elective public office pursuant to a general or special  
15 election.

16 **42-9.4-3. Establishment.** -- There shall be established within the department of attorney  
17 general a public corruption and white collar crime unit. The unit shall consist of at least an  
18 assistant or special assistant attorney general designated by the attorney general. The unit is  
19 authorized to perform the following duties as the attorney general may direct, including, but not  
20 limited to:

21 (1) Investigate potential cases of abuse of the public trust in accordance with the Rhode  
22 Island general laws;

23 (2) Prosecute cases of abuse of the public trust in accordance with the Rhode Island  
24 general laws;

25 (3) Cooperate with the United States Attorney's Office, the Federal Bureau of  
26 Investigation, the Rhode Island state police and the Rhode Island ethics commission on  
27 investigations and prosecutions related to the abuse of the public trust; or

28 (4) Establish a whistleblower hotline for reports of potential violations regarding abuse of  
29 the public trust.

30 **42-9.4-4. Whistleblower protections.** -- (a) Prohibition against discrimination. No  
31 person may discharge, demote, threaten or otherwise discriminate against any person or employee  
32 with respect to compensation, terms, conditions or privileges of employment as a reprisal because  
33 the person or employee, or any person acting pursuant to the request of the employee, provided or  
34 attempted to provide information to the attorney general or their designee or other law

1 enforcement entities regarding possible violations of the Rhode Island general laws by public  
2 servants.

3 (b) Enforcement. Any person or employee or former employee that believes that they  
4 have been discharged or discriminated against in violation of subsection (a) of this section may  
5 file a civil action within three (3) years of the date of the discharge or discrimination.

6 (c) Remedies. If the court determines that a violation has occurred, the court may order  
7 the person who committed the violation to:

8 (1) Reinstatement of the employee to the employee's former position;

9 (2) Payment of compensatory damages, costs of litigation and attorneys' fees; and/or

10 (3) Other appropriate actions to remedy any past discrimination.

11 (d) Limitation. The protections of this section shall not apply to any person or employee  
12 who:

13 (1) Deliberately causes or participates in the alleged violation of law or regulation; or

14 (2) Knowingly or recklessly provides substantially false information to the attorney  
15 general or their designees.

16 **42-9.4-5. No derogation of attorney general. --** No provision of this chapter shall  
17 derogate from the common law or statutory authority of the attorney general, nor shall any  
18 provision be construed as a limitation on the common law or statutory authority of the attorney  
19 general.

20 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 - PUBLIC CORRUPTION AND  
WHITE COLLAR CRIME UNIT

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- 1           The act would codify the public corruption and white collar crime unit within the
- 2 department of attorney general.
- 3           This act would take effect upon passage.

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