



1350 I STREET NW
SUITE 700
WASHINGTON, DC 20005
202-588-5180
NWLC.ORG

May 27, 2026

Senator Matthew L. LaMountain, Chair
Senator Mark P. McKenney, Vice Chair
Senate Judiciary Committee
State of Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support for Senate Bills 2938, 2939, 2947 to Strengthen the Judicial Selection Process and Improve Judicial Diversity

Dear Chairperson LaMountain, Vice Chair McKenney, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the National Women's Law Center Action Fund (NWLCAF). NWLCAF is a national non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to the protection and advancement of legal rights and opportunities for women, girls, and all who face sex discrimination. As a critical part of that work, NWLCAF strongly advocates for fair judicial selection processes as well as increases in gender, racial, and professional diversity on our nation's courts at all levels.¹

In furtherance of these goals, NWLCAF writes to express strong support for the package of reforms contained in Senate Bills 2938, 2939, and 2947. Taken together, the bills would bring new transparency into Rhode Island's judicial selection process, improve judicial selection criteria, and overall bolster diversity in Rhode Island's courts.

To start, **S. 2938** would strengthen Rhode Island's existing Judicial Nominating Commission ("the Commission") in a variety of ways.

By requiring the Commission to provide public forums when adopting new rules and procedures, as well as requiring the streaming and recording of open meetings, the public will have more input and transparency into the body charged with the selection of judges who will decide critical questions concerning state law and their everyday lives. Not only is this involvement important in its own right but these changes would also help safeguard against prejudice and/or selective dealings in the Commission's future operations.

¹ See Letter from Alison Gill to Governors, "Re: Call to Prioritize Gender, Racial, and Professional Diversity in State Courts," National Women's Law Center (2025), <https://nwlc.org/resource/nwlc-sends-letter-urging-governors-to-prioritize-gender-racial-and-professional-diversity-in-state-courts/>.

Similarly, the bill's requirement that judicial candidates disclose political donations will help promote public confidence in the fairness of the judicial selection process overall.

And the bill's important provisions that would directly involve Rhode Island Supreme Court Committee on Racial and Ethnic Fairness and the Rhode Island Bar Association and its Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in selecting new or replacement members of the Commission when not replaced via the standard process, would significantly strengthen existing statutory directives² designed to encourage diversity on both the Commission and within Rhode Island's courts.

S. 2939, by requiring the chief judge of the family court to adhere to the existing judicial selection process when appointing magistrates, operates to further similar goals by promoting greater uniformity in selection standards across the state's courts and help to ensure that qualified and diverse jurists serve at every level of the judiciary.

Finally, **S. 2947's** requirement that the Judicial Nominating Commission establish a new, merit-based selection process—including an initial, blind review of judicial applications—would go far in reducing the potential for bias and favoritism to impact the commission's decision-making process and promote the fair evaluation of a wide range of candidates.

Taken together, these changes will significantly build on Rhode Island's efforts to foster a strong, diverse court system. Diverse state judiciaries are better equipped to evaluate all who come before them with impartiality. Having a demographically and professionally diverse state improves judicial decision-making, as it ensures a variety of experiences and perspectives are represented on the bench, and also fosters greater public trust in the fairness and legitimacy of the courts.

For these reasons, the National Women's Law Center Action Fund respectfully urges the Committee to support and advance Senate Bills 2938, 2939, and 2947. Please contact me at agill@nwlc.org if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Alison Gill
Director of Nominations & Democracy
National Women's Law Center Action Fund

² See R.I. Gen. Laws. § 8-16.1-2(a)(3); 8-16.1-4(b).