



Rhode Island's New Workplace Laws: Menopause Protections, "Captive Audience" Meeting Ban, Minimum Wage Hikes, and More

Insights

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Rhode Island employers must keep up with new workplace laws enacted this year, including some that have already taken effect. The state not only joined a growing number of states that prohibit so-called "captive audience" meetings and became the first to provide explicit protections for employees managing the menopausal transition, it also added new onboarding notice requirements and hiked the minimum wage for 2026. Here's a quick guide to help you keep track of it all and prepare for the changes.

Accommodations for Menopause-Related Conditions (Effective June 24, 2025)

Rhode Island just became the first state to explicitly enact workplace protections for women experiencing the menopausal transition. Gov. Dan McKee signed a [bill into law](#) on June 24 that extends the state's existing law requiring workplace accommodations for pregnancy- and childbirth-related conditions to also cover menopause-related conditions.

Under the new law, employers in the state with at least four or more employees:

- must, upon request, make **reasonable accommodations** for a current or prospective employee's condition related to menopause or a related medical condition (including, but not limited to, vasomotor symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats), unless the accommodation would pose an undue hardship on the employer;
- are **prohibited from denying employment opportunities** based on a woman's need for such accommodations; and
- must **update certain employee notices and workplace posters** to include the new workplace protections related to menopause and menopause-related conditions (you can find the updated form notice [here](#), but the poster does not yet appear to be updated)."

The legislation was first introduced by Sen. Lori Urso (D-Dist. 8, Pawtucket), who said in a [July 1 press release](#) that the new law is "the first step toward setting a nationwide example by protecting our workers, retaining our talent, and helping women achieve their highest potential."

Further FP Reading: [The Untapped ROI of Menopause-Savvy Workplaces](#)

Ban on Captive Audience Meetings (Effective July 2, 2025)

A new Rhode Island law, which was signed by Gov. McKee on July 2 and took effect immediately, bans so-called “captive audience” meetings. Specifically, the new law prohibits employers from discharging, disciplining, or otherwise penalizing or taking any adverse employment action (or threatening to do so) against an employee for refusing to:

- attend an employer-sponsored meeting **or**
- listen to speech or view communications (including electronic communications)

if the primary purpose of the meeting, speech, or communications is to communicate the employer’s opinion concerning religious or political matters.

What qualifies as political or religious matters? Here’s how the law defines these terms:

“Political matters” means topics that are unrelated to the employer’s business or business activities, such as subjects relating to elections for political office, political parties, proposals to change legislation or regulations which are not directly related to the employer’s business, and a decision whether to join or support any political party or political, civic, community, fraternal, or labor organization.

“Religious matters” means matters relating to religious affiliation and practice and the decision whether to join or support any religious organization or association.

The new law does **not**:

- apply to employers that qualify for the “religious organization” exemption under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act; or
- bar higher education institutions from meeting with or participating in any communications with its employees that are part of coursework, any symposia, or an academic program at such institution.

The law also does **not** prohibit any employer from:

- communicating information to employees that is required by law to be communicated or necessary for employees to perform their job duties; or
- engaging in casual conversations with employees (so long as participation is not required).

Employees who are (or are threatened to be) discharged, disciplined, or otherwise penalized to subject to an adverse employment action have a right to bring a civil action against the employer. Courts may award prevailing employees damages, reasonable attorneys’ fees and costs, and other appropriate relief, such as:

- injunctive relief;
- reinstatement to the employee's former position or an equivalent position;
- back pay; and
- reestablishment of any employee benefits, including seniority, to which the employee would otherwise have been eligible if the violation had not occurred.

While the legality of captive audience meetings may soon be restored at the federal level, such meetings will remain banned for Rhode Island employers due to this new state law.

Further FP Reading:

- **Trump Names New Labor Board Nominees: The 5 Cases That Could Soon Reshape the Law**
- **Acting NLRB Counsel Rolls Back Many Biden-Era Labor Memos and Begins Process of Changing U.S. Labor Laws: What Employers Need to Know**

Minimum Wage Hike (Effective January 1, 2026)

The state's minimum wage will increase from \$15 per hour to **\$16 per hour in 2026**. It will jump again to \$17 per hour in 2027.

New Onboarding Notice Requirements (Effective January 1, 2026)

Starting in 2026, employers will have new notice and recordkeeping requirements related to new hires employed in Rhode Island. A new law taking effect January 1 will require employers to:

- provide a written notice (containing specific payroll and other information, as explained below) to each employee at the start of their employment;
- have each new hire sign the notice to acknowledge they've received it; and
- keep a copy of each signed notice for at least three years.

The new onboarding notice must include:

- the employee's pay rate, how they will be paid (such as by the hour, shift, day, week, salary, piece, commission, or other method), and the specific application of any additional rates;
- the number of days in the pay period, the regularly scheduled payday, and the employee's first payday;
- the employee's employment status and whether they are exempt from minimum wage and/or overtime;

- a list of deductions that may be made from the employee's pay and, if applicable, any allowances claimed for meals and lodging;
- the employer's policy on sick, vacation, personal leave, holidays, and hours; and
- the employer's contact and identifying information, including its legal name, operating name (if different), physical address, mailing address (if different), and telephone number.

Employers that fail to comply with these requirements will face a penalty of **\$400** for a first or second violation. For subsequent violations, employers will face **criminal liability** – including a fine (not less than \$400 per violation), up to one year of imprisonment, or both.

Human Trafficking Prevention Rules for Hotels and More (Effective January 1, 2026)

Starting in 2026, all hotel employees and short-term rental property operators must annually receive specific human trafficking awareness training established or approved by the state's Department of Business Regulation (DBR), including within 180 days of employment or the first listing. In addition, operators of hotels or short-term rental properties in the state will be required to:

- keep records of such employee or operator training until at least one year after the employee separates from employee or the operation ends;
- provide such records to DBR within a reasonable amount of time (no more than 10 days) upon a written request; and
- implement procedures and adopt policies for reporting suspected human trafficking to the national human trafficking hotline or to a local law enforcement agency.

The state law defines "human trafficking" as the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act and the commission of a trafficking offense under state law.

Further FP Reading: The Surprising Ways Your Company Can Be Liable for Human Trafficking – And 4 Steps to Minimize Dangers

Conclusion

Rhode Island employers should update their policies and practices to comply with the new rules for menopause-related accommodations and the captive audience meeting ban now in effect. You should also start preparing to comply with the changes kicking in January 1, including an increased minimum wage and new onboarding notice requirements.

We will continue to monitor all aspects of workplace law. For more information, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney or the authors of this Insight. Make sure you are subscribed to Fisher Phillips' Insight System to receive the most up-to-date information directly to your inbox.

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