

2021 -- H 5028

LC000524

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE CIVIC LITERACY ACT

Introduced By: Representative Brian C. Newberry

Date Introduced: January 15, 2021

Referred To: House Health, Education & Welfare

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 22.3

4 THE CIVIC LITERACY ACT

5 **16-22.3-1. Short Title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "The Civic Literacy Act."

7 **16-22.3-2. Legislative Findings.**

8 The legislature finds and declares that:

9 (1) The adoption of the United States Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the signing
10 of the United States Constitution were principal events in the history of the United States. The
11 Declaration of Independence providing the philosophical foundation on which this nation rests and
12 the Constitution of the United States providing its structure of government.

13 (2) It is essential to the health of Rhode Island and of our republic, that all citizens be
14 knowledgeable about democratic principles and practices, including the fundamental documents of
15 the United States Declaration of Independence, the Federalist Papers, the United States
16 Constitution, and the Rhode Island Constitution.

17 (3) Many Americans lack even the most basic knowledge and understanding of the history
18 of our nation, fundamental democratic principles, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the
19 participatory skills necessary for effective and responsible participation as competent citizens.

1 (4) Providing civic education and promoting good citizenship and understanding of
2 fundamental democratic principles should be a core mission of our state's schools.

3 (5) The survival of the republic requires that our nation's children, the future guardians of
4 its heritage, and participants in its governance, have a firm, actionable knowledge and
5 understanding of its principles and history.

6 **16-22.3-3. Purpose.**

7 The purpose and intent of this chapter is to require all students between grades eight (8)
8 and twelve (12), attending public schools, or other schools managed and controlled by the state of
9 Rhode Island, to complete a course in American Civics proficiency, as defined in § 16-22.3-6,
10 through project based assessment, commencing with the graduating class of 2025, and all
11 graduating classes thereafter.

12 **16-22.3-4. Administration.**

13 The commissioner of elementary and secondary education shall adopt and promulgate rules
14 and regulations for the administration of this chapter to:

15 (1) Specifically provide for curriculum content and teacher training to ensure the intent of
16 this legislation.

17 (2) Create a project-based civics learning assessment for district adoption, requiring
18 students to conduct analytical research on a local community issue of his or her choice, engage an
19 institution of government to influence the issue, and fulfill a summative assessment to demonstrate
20 the process and outcomes.

21 (3) Articulate specific quantifiable standards for student-led civics projects and support
22 local education agencies in the implementation.

23 (4) Prioritize supporting course implementation in districts that serve historically
24 underserved students, including low-income, immigrant or refugee students.

25 **16-22.3-5. Funding for Civics Education.**

26 (a) There shall be established and set up on the accounts of the Rhode Island department
27 of education, a separate fund to be known as the "civics project trust fund." The fund shall be
28 administered by the Rhode Island commissioner of education. The fund shall be funded with:

29 (1) Revenue from appropriations or other money authorized by the legislature and
30 specifically designated to be credited to the fund;

31 (2) Interest earned on the revenues set forth in subsection (a)(1) of this section; and

32 (3) Funds from public or private sources such as gifts, grants and any other donations to
33 further civic education and professional development.

34 (b) The amounts credited to the fund shall not be subject to further appropriation and any

1 money remaining in the fund at the end of the fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund. The
2 amounts credited to the fund may focus on underserved communities, including those school
3 districts with high concentrations of economically disadvantaged students, and may be expended,
4 without further appropriation, by the commissioner of education to administer the requirements set
5 forth in §§ 16-22.3-3 and 16-22.3-4, and further ensuring a diverse teacher workforce, in the subject
6 matter of social studies, that reflects student demographics to the maximum extent possible.

7 **16-22.3-6. Reporting and assessment.**

8 (a) The commissioner of elementary and secondary education shall submit an annual report
9 to the governor and the legislature describing the specific rules and regulations issued pursuant to
10 this chapter and reporting the effectiveness of these rules and regulations, as measured by the
11 passage of the course or courses pursuant to § 16-22.3-3.

12 (b) For purposes of statewide accountability, proficiency in civics education means the
13 development of civics knowledge regarding the history and heritage of the United States,
14 foundational documents, and the roles and responsibilities of federal, state and local documents, as
15 well as the development of skills to access, analyze, debate and evaluate media, historical trends,
16 and public policy issues related to the common good.

17 **16-22.3-7. Severability.**

18 If any provisions of this chapter are declared unconstitutional, or the applicability of any
19 provisions to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the constitutionality of the remainder of
20 the chapter and its applicability to other persons and circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

21 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 EDUCATION -- THE CIVIC LITERACY ACT

1 This act would require the implementation of the civic literacy act for all students between
2 the eighth grade and twelfth grade, attending public schools, or other schools managed and
3 controlled by the state of Rhode Island, requiring the students to demonstrate proficiency in civics
4 education, commencing with the graduating class of 2025 and all graduating classes thereafter.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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