

Good afternoon,

I am a lifelong Rhode Islander from Warwick and have worked at RIDOH since 2018. In my current role, I spend a significant amount of time analyzing data about RIDOH's workforce. In the 2024 PH WINS (Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey), lack of opportunity for advancement was identified as a top reason for staff to consider leaving state service. This was reflected in an anonymous all-staff survey we conducted in 2025, where less than half of respondents reported being satisfied with opportunities for advancement and career growth. I therefore believe that reforming state policies to facilitate more opportunities for growth should be a top priority if we hope to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce.

For many positions, the supervisory requirement prevents staff from advancing, despite advancements in their skill and level of responsibility after several years in their roles. In any organization, not everyone can be a manager. Yet, there must be other avenues for dedicated, skilled employees to grow in their role. For positions in my union, NEARI/PSA, step increases within a pay grade/classification happen at pre-established time intervals, where you reach the maximum of your grade within just 2.5 years. Reclassification (desk audit) is the only opportunity for "merit-based" promotions. Without it, staff must choose between long-term stagnation at the top of their current classification (often while taking on additional responsibility anyway) or leaving their position altogether for one of a higher grade or outside of state service. If they chose the latter, we lose valuable talent and institutional knowledge that we could've potentially retained if it was possible for them to advance within their role without being a supervisor.

Additionally, the current language in many classifications requires supervision of other FTEs, and supervision of contractors does not count. This means that people who are supervisors, but of contractors, may not be eligible for reclassification due simply to the limitations of state hiring mechanisms, not because of lack of merit or level of responsibility. At RIDOH, we have hovered at or near our FTE cap for years, so hiring is limited, even when we have funding for it. The opportunity to become a supervisor is thus further limited by the low number of new FTEs being hired at entry level positions.

I was fortunate that the classifications in my position type (epidemiologist) were revised in 2022 to remove the supervisory requirement. This allowed me to complete a desk audit so my title and pay could reflect the increase in my skill and responsibility level after 3.5 years in my position. I have colleagues who have worked at RIDOH for many years who have previously been denied reclassification due to the supervisory requirement, who then had to wait for years for the stars to align with changes in funding or team structure for them to become a supervisor. It's unfair that their hard work and years of service did not qualify them for advancement on merit due to an outdated requirement. I support this bill as a step toward improving career advancement pathways for my fellow state employees, improving retention, and keeping dedicated, highly skilled staff in state service.

Thank you,

Katie St. Amand