

My name is Anna Tomasulo. I am a resident of Cranston and a Principal Public Health Promotion Specialist at the Rhode Island Department of Health. I joined RIDOH's Communications Team in October 2019 after several years in technical communications and communications in international health and development. I am assigned to coordinate communications for RIDOH's Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response. As such, I was activated to Rhode Island's COVID-19 response starting on February 29, 2020 and worked for the response through the end of the federal public health emergency in May 2023. During this time, my responsibilities grew enormously in a short period of time. I covered for coworkers on leave, managed communications for different aspects of the COVID-19 response, represented RIDOH communications in meetings with other state agencies and external partners, and supervised multiple contract staff. During this time, I was working above my pay grade. However, because I was supervising contractors, I was ineligible from seeking a desk audit.

I recognize the cost-savings associated with hiring contractors. However, there is a serious risk of long-term costs. Workforce surveys reveal that staff consistently report lack of advancement opportunities and lack of career growth as a problem. We risk losing significant institutional knowledge and experience as FTEs leave their positions because they aren't able to grow in their careers. Further, because we have so many contractors in state employment, the opportunities to supervise FTEs are limited.

I have been lucky. I had the opportunity to increase my FTE supervisees and then seek a desk audit. I moved from a Senior Public Health Promotion Specialist to Principal Public Health Promotion Specialist. In my continued work in Emergency Public Communications, I supervise staff (FTEs and contractors) who support an array of programs and divisions. I have not experienced a difference in the time and skill required to effectively supervise a contractor versus an FTE.

So many of us are in this work because we care deeply about serving our communities and protecting the public's health. We want to do good work and we want to grow and learn while doing it. I urge members to vote in favor of H7217 to help keep people who want to serve in their careers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Anna Tomasulo, MA, MPH