



**Highlights from the 2023-2024 Rhode Island General Assembly State Legislative Effectiveness Scores**

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**Executive Summary**

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the recently completed 2023-2024 Rhode Island General Assembly legislative session. This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective legislators in the majority party in both chambers, the top-3 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the House of Representatives, and the top most effective minority-party lawmakers in the Senate. Many listed lawmakers continued their highly effective lawmaking patterns from the previous legislative session.
- We identify those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category, as well as first-term lawmakers in this category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. Before and during the 2023-2024 legislative session, majority-party Democratic lawmakers consistently received higher State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) and achieved better bill outcomes in comparison to minority-party Republican lawmakers. While minority-party Republicans are disadvantaged in lawmaking, they are not entirely shut out of the process. Republicans in Rhode Island average an overall SLES of 0.50, which is close to the national average among minority-party lawmakers of 0.60. However, Democratic lawmakers still enjoy significantly better bill outcomes, demonstrating that partisanship continues to be strongly tied to lawmaking effectiveness in Rhode Island.
- Serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. This phenomenon is highlighted during the 2023-2024 Rhode Island General Assembly, where many of the most effective majority-party lawmakers held committee chair positions.

- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across multiple sessions, as several legislators appear on the top-10, top-3, or top-most lists in both the 2023-2024 and 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

## Introduction and Methodology

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator’s majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 2023-2024 Rhode Island House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.51 compared to 1.07 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 1.43. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.46 in the minority party, 1.08 in the majority party, and 1.48 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as “Above Expectations” for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, “Below Expectations” for those below 50% of their benchmark, and “Meeting Expectations” for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the lists of top performers highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire Rhode Island General Assembly together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

### Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Rhode Island House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives. Six of the top ten were committee chairs.

#### Top Ten List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	<b>Terri-Denise Cortvriend (District 72)</b>	2.38	None
2.	<b>John Edwards (District 70)</b>	2.33	None
3.	<b>Robert Craven (District 32)</b>	2.27	Chair
4.	<b>Jacquelyn Baginski (District 17)</b>	2.04	Chair

<b>5.</b>	<b>June Speakman (District 68)</b>	1.98	None
<b>6.</b>	<b>Hagan McEntee (District 33)</b>	1.98	Chair
<b>7.</b>	<b>Joseph McNamara (District 19)</b>	1.93	Chair
<b>8.</b>	<b>Julia Casimiro (District 31)</b>	1.88	None
<b>9.</b>	<b>Joseph Solomon (District 22)</b>	1.88	Chair
<b>10.</b>	<b>Patricia Serpa (District 27)</b>	1.80	Chair

At the top of the list is Representative Terri-Denise Cortvriend from District 72 (Portsmouth and Middletown) with a score of 2.38. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, she introduced 54 bills, 53 of which received action in committee, 23 of which received action beyond committee, 22 of which passed the House of Representatives, and 20 of which became law.

Rep. Cortvriend joined the House of Representatives in 2018. Before joining the House, she served on the Portsmouth School Committee, the Portsmouth Water and Fire District Advisory Board, the Portsmouth Tank Farm Redevelopment Advisory Committee, the Portsmouth Charter Review Committee, and the Portsmouth Economic Development Committee. Rep. Cortvriend is a graduate of Miami Dade Community College. In addition, she studied business management at Florida International University and accounting at Community College of Rhode Island. Professionally, Rep. Cortvriend is the owner of Ocean Link Inc., a marine plumbing company she founded in 1989. She previously worked as a yacht captain and is a member of the Rhode Island Marine Trades Association.

Five Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. John Edwards (District 70), Rep. Jacquelyn Baginski (District 17), Rep. Hagan McEntee (District 33), Rep. Joseph McNamara (District 19), and Rep. Joseph Solomon (District 22).

### **Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Rhode Island House of Representatives**

The following table identifies the top three highest scorers in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives among minority-party Republicans.

#### **Top Three List—House Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u><b>Name</b></u>	<u><b>LES</b></u>	<u><b>Seniority</b></u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>David Place (District 47)</b>	1.49	3
<b>2.</b>	<b>Michael Chippendale (District 40)</b>	0.93	7
<b>3.</b>	<b>Brian Newberry (District 48)</b>	0.60	8

Topping our list is Representative David Place of District 47 (Burrillville and Glocester) with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 1.49. He introduced 67 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative

session, 66 received action in committee, 9 received action beyond committee, and 8 passed the House and became law.

Rep. Place has been a member of the House of Representatives since 2018 and has been the House Minority Whip since 2022. Before joining the House, he was a Burrillville Town Council member from 2010-2018. Rep. Place is a U.S. Army veteran, serving 10 years as an Army staff sergeant as a tank commander on an M1A1 Abrams. He was deployed in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom II and received formal recognition for his leadership while in combat. After deployment, Rep. Place graduated with a B.S. in accounting from Rhode Island College and worked as a machinist.

Rep. Place was also among the top-3 highest Republican scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session.

### **Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Rhode Island State Senate**

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 State Senate. Six of the top ten most effective Democratic lawmakers in the Senate were committee chairs.

#### **Top Ten List—Senate Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>LES</u></b>	<b><u>Committee Chair</u></b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Alana DiMario (District 36)</b>	2.11	Chair
<b>2.</b>	<b>Dawn Euer (District 13)</b>	2.07	Chair
<b>3.</b>	<b>Louis DiPalma (District 12)</b>	1.97	Chair
<b>4.</b>	<b>Melissa Murray (District 24)</b>	1.70	None
<b>5.</b>	<b>Matthew LaMountain (District 31)</b>	1.70	None
<b>6.</b>	<b>Hanna Gallo (District 27)</b>	1.68	None
<b>7.</b>	<b>Frank Lombardi (District 26)</b>	1.61	None
<b>8.</b>	<b>Sandra Cano (District 8)</b>	1.57	Chair
<b>9.</b>	<b>Frank Ciccone (District 7)</b>	1.53	Chair
<b>10.</b>	<b>Mark McKenney (District 30)</b>	1.38	Chair

Among Democrats in the State Senate, Senator Alana DiMario from District 36 (Narragansett, North Kingstown, and New Shoreham) ranked first with a SLES score of 2.11. In the 2023-2024 legislative session she introduced 84 bills, 81 of which received action in committee, 43 of which received action beyond committee and passed the Senate, and 27 of which became law.

Sen. DiMario was elected to the Senate in November 2020. She graduated with a bachelor’s degree from Wells College and holds a master’s degree in clinical psychology from Bridgewater State University. Today, she works as a licensed mental health counselor in a private practice. In the community, Sen. DiMario previously served on the board of the Rhode Island Chapter of the National Organization for Women (RINOW). RINOW advocates for women’s access and

participation in public and private life. She also recently completed a fellowship with the National Conference of State Legislatures on Early Childhood Issues and Policy.

Four legislators on the list were among the top 10 highest-scoring Senate Democrats in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Dawn Euer (District 13), Sen. Louis DiPalma (District 12), Sen. Sandra Cano (District 8), and Sen. Frank Ciccone (District 7).

**Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Rhode Island State Senate**

The following table identifies the most effective Republican lawmaker in the 2023-2024 State Senate.

**Top Senate Republican (2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Jessica De La Cruz (District 23)</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>3</b>

Senator Jessica De La Cruz from District 23 (North Smithfield, Burrillville, and Glocester) had the highest SLES for Senate Republicans in the 2023-2024 legislative session with a score of 0.80. She introduced 57 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative session, 37 of which received action in committee, 11 of which received action beyond committee, passed the Senate, and became law.

Sen. De La Cruz joined the Senate in 2019. She is the current Senate Minority Leader and the former Minority Whip. In 2021, she helped secure \$100 million in funding to rebuild and revitalize the Eleanor Slater Hospital in Burrillville. She was chosen in 2021 and 2023 to deliver the Republican response to the Governor's State of the State Address. In 2021, she received the Elected Women of Excellence Award from the National Foundation for Women Legislators. In addition, in 2022, she was named to the “Women to Watch List” by the super PAC of House Republican Conference Chairwoman Elise Stefanik.

Sen. De La Cruz also held the top spot as the most effective Senate Republican during the 2021-2022 legislative session.

**Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of “Above Expectations”**

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority party member and/or committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative session.

**State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”  
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>John Edwards (D-70)</b>	7 Legislative Sessions	2.33	8 Legislative Sessions
<b>2.</b>	<b>Julia Casimiro (D-31)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	1.88	4 Legislative Sessions
<b>3.</b>	<b>David Place (R-47)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	1.49	3 Legislative Sessions

Representative John “Jay” Edwards (D) of District 70 (Portsmouth and Tiverton) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 7 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 2.33 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Rep. Edwards sponsored 53 bills, 51 received action in committee, 26 received action beyond committee and passed the House, and 16 became law. Rep. Edwards has been consistently ranked among the top ten most effective Democratic lawmakers since 2015.

Rep. Edwards assumed office in 2009. During his time in the House, he has served as House Majority Whip, Senior Deputy Majority Leader, and the Majority Floor Manager. Before joining the House, Rep. Edwards was a member of the Tiverton Town Council from 2006-2008 and a member of the Tiverton Zoning Board from 1996-2006. He also served as the Chairman of Tiverton’s Elementary School Building Committee from 2004-2006 and as a member of the Landfill sub-committee from 2006-2008. He is a graduate of Northeastern University and works for PDSI Contractors. Rep. Edwards is a member of various professional groups, including the Rhode Island Builders Association. In the community, Rep. Edwards has been involved with the Tiverton Land Trust, the Maine Island Trail Association, the Sierra Club, and the Tiverton Democratic Town Committee.

**State Senator with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”  
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Frank Lombardi (D-26)</b>	3 Legislative Sessions	1.61	6 Legislative Sessions

Senator Frank Lombardi (D) of District 26 (Cranston) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 3 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 1.61 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Sen. Lombardi proposed 74 bills, 67 of which received action in committee, 29 of which received action beyond committee and passed the House, and 22 of which became law. Sen. Lombardi consistently ranked in the top-10 most effective Democratic Senators from 2015-2020.

Sen. Lombardi assumed office in 2013. He holds a B.A. in business from Providence College and a J.D. from Northeastern University School of Law. After passing the bar in 1988, he focused on representing clients in various legal matters across all Rhode Island Courts. He is the owner of Frank S. Lombardi Law Associates, P.C. In addition to his role in the State, Sen. Lombardi served on the City of Cranston School Committee for 18 years and as Clerk and Acting Probate Judge for the City of Providence.

### High-Performing Freshmen

One way to identify future legislative leaders is to identify freshmen Representatives and Senators who earned an “Above Expectations” rating in their first term. For freshman legislators, their initial scores are compared to benchmarks for newcomers—so when a freshman outperforms their cohort, it can reveal strong political acumen, the ability to navigate legislative procedures quickly, and skill in coalition-building or policy entrepreneurship. These traits often correlate with future leadership roles. Our research on the U.S. Congress suggests that legislators who perform well early on are more likely to be selected for committee chairs or leadership positions and to influence major legislation in subsequent terms. Hence, identifying high-performing freshmen can offer early signals of who might rise through the ranks.

#### Freshmen Representative “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	<b>Brandon Voas (D-57)</b>	1.35

The State Representative who scored "Above Expectations" during his freshman term was Democratic Representative Brandon Voas (Cumberland and Central Falls) with a score of 1.35.

During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Rep. Voas introduced 23 bills, all of which received action in committee, 15 of which received action beyond committee, 14 of which passed the House, and 12 of which became law. Rep. Voas is a lifelong Cumberland resident. He graduated with a Liberal Arts degree from the Community College of Rhode Island. Shortly after, he began a career in the auto industry and is now the Parts Director for Ballard Mack Truck Center in Johnston.

#### Freshmen Senator “Above Expectations” (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>
1.	<b>Matthew LaMountain (D-31)</b>	1.70

Senator Matthew LaMountain (D) of District 31 (Warwick and Cranston) was the freshman Senator who scored "Above Expectations" for the 2023-2024 legislative session. He proposed 73 bills during the 2023-2024 legislative session, 69 received action in committee, 33 received action

beyond committee and passed the Senate, and 21 became law. Additionally, Sen. LaMountain was ranked as the fifth most effective lawmaker in the 2023-2024 Rhode Island General Assembly.

Sen. LaMountain currently serves as the Deputy President Pro Tempore of the Senate. He is a graduate of Salve Regina University and holds a J.D. from Suffolk University School of Law. He served as a prosecutor for the Rhode Island Attorney General's office from 2011-2019, specializing in cybercrime and digital evidence. He was an assistant city solicitor for the City of Warwick from 2019-2021, currently operates his own law practice, and is a member of the Suffolk Law Public Interest Group.

### **Other Findings**

In terms of broader patterns, partisanship continues to be strongly associated with lawmaking in Rhode Island, with very few Republicans serving in the General Assembly and with their proposals facing difficulty becoming law. While the SLES of minority-party lawmakers across the country on the whole averages about 0.6, the scores for minority-party members in Rhode Island have been slightly lower, averaging around 0.5.

While Republicans are disadvantaged in lawmaking in Rhode Island, they have not been completely shut out of the legislative process. For example, in the 2023-2024 term, Republican Senators each averaged about 5 of their bills becoming law, while the average number of laws per Democratic Senator was 13. In the House, a similar pattern emerged, with about 7 laws coming from an average majority-party lawmaker compared to under 3 for the average minority-party lawmaker.

### **Conclusion**

The 2023-2024 Rhode Island General Assembly legislative session demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold an advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in Rhode Island.