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On Governor’s Working Groups, RWU Experts Pitch In on Statewide Challenges

Adriana Dawson, Anna Cano Morales, Judge Judith Savage, Doug White among team members named to task forces on women’s issues, criminal justice reform and cybersecurity

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BRISTOL, R.I. – “Have a problem to solve in Rhode Island government? There’s a working group for that.”

That’s according to reporter Jennifer Bogdan of the Providence Journal, who in the newspaper’s “Political Scene” column on Aug. 17, detailed how Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo has launched a series of working groups since taking office in January, each aimed at addressing a particular challenge facing the state.

And among the business, nonprofit, policy and academic leaders contributing expertise to these task forces and building action plans are a number of faculty and staff from Roger Williams University, including Adriana Dawson, Anna Cano Morales, Judge Judith Savage and Doug White.

Here’s how Raimondo spokeswoman Marie Aberger described the value of the working groups, according to the Providence Journal column: “These working groups bring experts together from diverse fields – both in and out of government – to develop recommendations to tackle some of the biggest challenges we face. The members bring their unique perspectives to the table to help innovate in government so we can deliver quality services at lower costs to taxpayers.”
White – a professor of networking, security and forensics and director of the Center for Forensics, Applied Networking and Security – was appointed to the Rhode Island Cybersecurity Commission, convened by the governor’s executive order in May. The group is developing a strategy to capitalize on the state’s ability to grow a thriving cybersecurity sector and to improve protections against cyber disruptions in the public and private sector. White believes the governor’s decision to appoint a committee for each project is an effective strategy.

“Rhode Island has been forward-thinking on cybersecurity for years, and we have a number of groups – from academics to professionals to military and police and fire – who are good at what they do and willing to share their knowledge,” White says. “Why just have one group of bureaucrats look at the issue when you can bring together this broader group of experts? That’s exactly what Governor Raimondo has done by creating the cybersecurity commission. It’s a brilliant strategy.”

Savage – an adjunct faculty member at RWU Law who convened a groundbreaking symposium on mass incarceration at the law school last spring – and Morales, director of the Latino Policy Institute at RWU, are serving on the Justice Reinvestment Working Group. The working group will advise on ways to improve Rhode Island’s criminal justice system by reducing recidivism, addressing racial disparities and promoting healthy communities, among other focus areas.

“I thank the Governor for the opportunity to work with the Chief Justice, the Council of State Governments and the talented members of the Justice Reinvestment Working Group to explore the possibilities for creative change in our criminal justice system – changes that can improve lives, make us safer, and save tax dollars while addressing our burgeoning prison and probation populations,” Savage said when the working group was announced in July. “After spending the last year at the Roger Williams University School of Law educating students and the broader community about the issues of mass incarceration and mass probation, it is time to roll up our sleeves and address these problems.”

Dawson, assistant dean for professional education and employer outreach at the Roger Williams University School of Continuing Studies, was named to the Rhode Island Commission on Women, a group the governor revived in March to advocate for issues impacting women in Rhode Island.