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Courageous RI Works to Prevent Rising Violence and Extremism
New Initiative Works to Build Media Literacy Through Training, Tools, and Community Conversation

PROVIDENCE R.I. - The Media Education Lab at the University of Rhode Island today launched Courageous RI, an initiative to provide interactive, hands-on training that counters disinformation, enhances civic participation, and improves media literacy. Funded with a $700,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Courageous RI was the only New England grant recipient in this national effort to prevent violence and extremism.

“Courageous RI will bring communities together for a series of open, unbiased, and respectful conversations. Through these convenings, engaging curriculum, education, and training, our goal is to foster informed communities that are more resilient when exposed to disinformation and propaganda,” said Dr. Renee Hobbs, founder and co-director of the Media Education Lab. “Courageous RI will provide individuals with practical strategies and problem-solving skills at a time when people spend an increasing amount of time online, on social media, and in other digital spaces.”

“As a former high school civics and history teacher, I have seen firsthand the value civics education carries not only for our students but for our democracy,” said Secretary of State Gregg Amore. “By providing a space where educators, students, and others can go for tools and support, Courageous RI is connecting Rhode Islanders to their communities, especially young people who are at particular risk of being exposed to dangerous disinformation and violence online.”

Amore was joined at the launch event by Senator Hanna Gallo (D-Dist. 27) and Representative Brian Newberry (R-Dist.48), lead sponsors of the bipartisan Civic Literacy Act, as well as Cranston Public Library Director Ed Garcia.

“Media literacy is an essential 21st century skill, not just for our young people, but for all people in our state,” said Sen. Gallo. “We need to understand and analyze the kinds of messages we are bombarded with each day, in the news, in our workplaces, and on social media. I’m grateful to Courageous RI for
creating an opportunity to do that, and for engaging more Rhode Islanders in a coalition to prevent the hate that is damaging the fabric of our communities.”

“Robust civics education should be a cornerstone of a high-quality education, yet more work is needed to ensure that every student has a full understanding of their responsibility as a voter and citizen,” said Rep. Newberry. “As a vocal and continued advocate for civics education—and lifelong learning on this subject—I am eager to see how Courageous RI advances the goals of countering disinformation, preventing violence, and empowering all Rhode Islanders to be effective agents of change in public policy.”

“Libraries are a place of exploration, discovery, and community; they are an epicenter for learning where all are welcome. However, the exchange of ideas that is a hallmark of the library system is increasingly being challenged. Courageous RI is exactly the kind of initiative—backed by best-in-class experts and evidence-based research—that fosters more productive and respectful public discourse,” said Cranston Public Library Director Ed Garcia.

Courageous RI is a three-part, two-year initiative that begins with Courageous Conversations, a series of free, online workshops that engage the public in examining media messages and building media literacy skills for a lifetime. These sessions offer structured small-group and large-group discussions of topics including propaganda and disinformation, hate speech, and media regulation.

“Thinking critically about what we hear, read, and see is important for Rhode Islanders of every background, across the political spectrum,” said Pam Steager, Courageous RI’s director of public engagement. “In our state and across the country, we are seeing the dangers of leaving disinformation unchecked. We invite all Rhode Islanders to attend these online conversations and join our community of learning so they can gain a renewed sense of empowerment, tolerance, and appreciation of other points of view.”

Courageous Questions, the second phase of programming, will provide professional development to educators and law enforcement officials so that media literacy can be used as a tool for civic education and violence prevention. Courageous Creativity, the final phase of programming, will invite high school and college students to participate in a youth multimedia contest where they can win prizes for creating media messages that invite Rhode Islanders to “stay curious, not furious” as they engage with the media they encounter in daily life.

To learn more about Courageous RI visit www.courageousri.com. To learn more about the Media Education Lab visit www.mediaeducationlab.com.

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About the Media Education Lab: The Media Education Lab is an online learning community whose mission is to advance the quality of digital and media literacy education through scholarship and community
service. Founded in 2005, the Media Education Lab includes a team of affiliated experts who represent a broad multidisciplinary network of educators, academics, and media professionals. More than 20,000 users from across the country and around the world participated in the programs and services offered by the Media Education Lab in 2022.