

February 24, 2021

Representative Marvin Abney
Chairman
House Finance Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: 2021 – H 5532

Dear Chairman Abney,

On behalf of Justice Assistance, we write to wholeheartedly support H 5532, which would redirect ten percent of fines imposed for misdemeanor offenses resulting in a filing to Justice Assistance in support of case managing persons receiving a filing with any sanctions.

Justice Assistance, an IRS certified 501(c)(3), has been a vital member of Rhode Island's justice system for more than forty-three years. Our mission is to strengthen the community by providing a unique mix of innovative and critical services to assist our state's justice system in a way that builds the capacity of people we care for to live safe, productive lives. Our three primary goals are: to help the victim navigate all phases of the justice system, facilitating a satisfactory outcome; to help the defendant successfully exit the justice system by facilitating an expedient and satisfactory completion of the court order; and to provide research and development for community-related program improvements.

Since 1978, Justice Assistance has returned over five million dollars in restitution to Rhode Island crime victims. We have worked with more than one hundred thousand crime victims in that period. In FY2019, over ninety percent of individuals receiving a filing and referred to Justice Assistance successfully completed their court ordered sanctions thanks to the diligence of the organization's case managers, keeping the defendant in these matters from being saddled with a criminal record and the associated stigmas and

hindrances that come with it.ⁱ In FY2020, COVID-19 forced Justice Assistance to adjust our service delivery model to address the many unforeseen challenges that arose as a result of the pandemic, but our success has continued at a rate the state courts and the individuals we serve have come to expect. Since 1978, we have quietly, but effectively, advanced criminal justice interests in our state.

The positive impact of Justice Assistance, however, is felt far beyond the boundaries of our state's justice system. Throughout our history, the organization has been a benefit to Rhode Island taxpayers through its innovative approach to managing justice involved individuals. In 2019, only ten percent of our clients were placed on court calendars for non-compliance. According to Rhode Island Department of Corrections' data, active community supervision cost the state \$5/day per person. Through the redirection of 1,089 offenders to Justice Assistance in FY2019, the state attained a potential savings of \$1,987,425.ⁱⁱ Justice Assistance also helps victims avoid lost wages by not having to attend non-compliance hearings. We are an organization that not only faithfully serves the individuals we work with, but also one that saves the state money through our unique service delivery model.

Justice Assistance has received the support of both the federal and state governments, as well as the private sector throughout its long history. Unfortunately, changes to funding formulas on the federal level and private sources of revenue being redirected to address the COVID-19 pandemic, have drastically reduced the amount of funding the organization has received over the past two years. The money that the organization has received from the Victims of Crime Act has fallen from \$258,1555 to \$85,320, as the amount of money allocated to Rhode Island from this US Department of Justice source has dropped by forty-six percent. This decrease has adversely impacted the organization, and while we have adapted to keep providing services, any further reductions could have lasting ramifications.

For over than thirty-five years, the Rhode Island Judiciary has contracted with Justice Assistance to provide victim-centered services to include the essential duties and responsibilities relating to all one-year filing referrals. Any individuals receiving a filing, and ordered to pay court costs, are assessed a fee of "sixty dollars (\$60.00 or ten percent (10%) of any fine imposed" to be collected on behalf of Rhode Island Department of Corrections' Probation and Parole.ⁱⁱⁱ Justice Assistance, while providing all services

associated with supervision of one-year filings, does not receive any portion of the court costs imposed on a defendant yet Probation and Parole receives sixty dollars, despite providing no supervision for individuals receiving a one-year filing.

To ensure that Justice Assistance can keep providing the level of service to Rhode Island that led to our recognition by the United States Department of Justice/Office of Justice Programs as an exemplary program, we urge you to pass H 5532. Though the money derived from ten percent of matters receiving a one-year filing may be a pittance to a budget like the Rhode Island Department of Corrections', it is critical in permitting us to keep serving the state and taxpayers of Rhode Island for years to come.

Sincerely,

Brendan Horan
Director of Marketing & Development

ⁱ 12 R.I. GEN LAWS § 12-10-12 (LEXIS through 2020 Sess.).

ⁱⁱ *Justice Reinvestment in Rhode Island: Overview*, The State Council of Governments (July 2015), <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/RhodeIslandOverview.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ 12 R.I. GEN LAWS § 12-18.1-3 (LEXIS through 2020 Sess.).