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Hello Chair Solomon,

My name is Erica McDonald, I am sharing my husband and I's experience with you regarding House Bill number H7605.

First, I would like to sincerely thank yourself and the committee for taking the time to receive my testimony about this bill. The fact that I am able to share my experience is an example of government functioning as it should, giving citizens a voice and a role in shaping the laws that protect them.

Unfortunately, the reason I am here is because, in this case, government failed to protect us.

At the end of December 2024, my husband and I purchased a used 2019 Toyota CH-R from Greico Toyota in East Providence. We felt confident in our decision. Both the Toyota brand and the Greico Toyota dealership are both respected brands in our community. There was no reason for my husband and I to doubt our purchase.

We took possession of the vehicle in January 2025 after a minor cosmetic repair to the exterior of the car.

Almost immediately, we noticed a strange odor inside the car — similar to a wet dog that had not been bathed. We also observed small brown spatters throughout the interior. We assumed the previous owner had transported a dog and had not cleaned the vehicle thoroughly.

The odor and the stains were unpleasant, but not alarming.

During the months of driving the car I began to clean the visible stains myself with plans to deep-clean the interior once the weather improved.

On Friday, April 18, 2025, I began cleaning the rear interior of the vehicle, focusing on the area where the odor seemed strongest. After just a few passes with a home upholstery cleaner, a dark reddish-brown substance began collecting in the machine's reservoir. That was the moment I realized something was very wrong.

As I looked closer, I found a small hole — about half an inch in diameter — in the back seat. I inspected the back of the rear seat and found a corresponding hole. I then removed the trunk liners to investigate further. After removing the trunk liners I discovered that the same dark red substance had soaked through the seat and saturated into the underside of the lower trunk liner.

At that point, I contacted the East Providence Police Department.

The officers conducted a lengthy and thorough investigation of the vehicle, both physically and through online records. When the sergeant returned to speak with my husband and I, she delivered news that no one could ever expect to hear. Nearly a year earlier, the car had been used in a murder-suicide in Acton, Massachusetts.

The victim was a young, teenage girl, was murdered by her stepfather. He had been charged with aggravated rape of a minor (his own stepdaughter) and was awaiting trial. After murdering her, he took his own life in the driver's seat of that same vehicle.

The very car I had been driving for four months.

We were stunned. We were devastated. And we were deeply shaken.

The East Providence Police assigned a detective and he, along with other, investigators began to process the car, our driveway and the exterior of our house as a crime scene.

Ultimately the East Providence Police took possession of the vehicle to complete their investigation.

What we learned afterward was equally disturbing. Once the Massachusetts State Police completed their investigation of the crime that occurred inside the car, they released the vehicle to a salvage yard. It was then repossessed from the salvage yard by the lien holder, Navigant Credit Union, and sold to Manheim Auto Auction in Taunton, Massachusetts. Eventually it wound up for sale at Greico Toyota.

According to the East Providence detective, Manheim's arbitration policies do not require disclosure of a vehicle's violent history so long as the car is cleaned.

The cleaning that was performed on the vehicle was clearly not enough. The evidence of what happened remained embedded in that car.

Neither we, nor Greico Toyota, were informed of the vehicle's history when it was purchased. Yet somewhere along the chain of transactions, that information existed.

Consumers have a reasonable expectation that a vehicle sold for public use has been made safe — not simply cosmetically presentable.

We should not have had to unknowingly transport our family members in a vehicle that was the site of a brutal and horrific crime.

We should not have to discover, on our own, the physical remnants of a homicide.

We should not have to carry the knowledge that we were exposed to bodily fluids and unknown chemical contaminants.

We should not have to live with the memory of part of our home being processed as a crime scene.

We should not have to now, and for the rest of our lives, carry the memory of a young girl who, through no fault of her own, lost her life in a horrific manner.

This does not have to happen to anyone else. This should not happen to anyone else.

Currently there is no law in the state of Rhode Island that requires disclosure or regulation of consumer vehicles that have a documented history of biohazard exposure or a history of being involved in violent crimes.

This bill is not about punishment. It is about transparency. It is about dignity. It is about ensuring that consumers are able to make informed decisions.

Government works best when it protects its citizens from preventable harm. I am asking you today to help close this gap and ensure that what happened to us does not happen to anyone else.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Erica and Jeremy McDonald
Riverside, Rhode Island