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April 8, 2026

Written Testimony for Public Hearing

House Finance Committee

Re: Testimony in Support of House Resolution No. 8207

Chair and Committee Members,

The Refugee Dream Center strongly supports House Resolution No. 8207, which appropriates \$100,000 to the Rhode Island Commission on Prejudice and Bias, ensuring that Rhode Island is better poised to combat bias and hate.

Rhode Island General Law 42-80-2 established the Commission on Prejudice and Bias (the Commission) in 1981 to study prejudice, bias, and hatred in Rhode Island in order to revise and codify all laws relating to prejudice, bias, and hatred. The 17-member commission includes state legislators, gubernatorial-appointed community leaders, Attorney General-appointed members, and law enforcement representatives. It is a prominent and necessary channel of communication between legislators, law enforcement, and the communities they are sworn to serve and protect. The Refugee Dream Center works closely with the Commission, and we appreciate and understand its invaluable impact on not only the refugee and immigrant communities we serve, but all of Rhode Island. We are witnessing a striking rise in hate directed at refugees, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations, making the work of the Commission even more important.

The Commission on Prejudice and Bias receives reports of hate crimes and incidents from Rhode Islanders and directs victims to resources, while advising police departments and the Office of the Attorney General where appropriate. The Commission provides guidance to the Governor, Attorney General, and legislature on critical laws and policies related to prejudice and bias. It also conducts and participates in community education events around the state and serves as a resource for first responders.

Mandated by Rhode Island General Law 42-28.2, the Commission's Hate Crime Training Program provides training for all law enforcement academies as well as police departments, victim's advocates, and community groups. These trainings support compliance with RI General Law 42-28-46, which mandates the reporting of hate crimes. Training has been operating without funding since October 1, 2024, and can no longer be expected to fulfill the demands of these laws.

The Commission had successfully operated through grants from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), the United States Bureau of Justice Assistance Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (JAG), the RI Department of Administration, and the RI Public Safety Grants Administration. These critical federal funding streams have been cut. The Commission's federal Shepard/Byrd Bureau of Justice Assistance Grant will terminate on September 30, leaving the Hate Crime Training Program with zero funding. The need for the Commission's work has never been greater, and these funding streams no longer enable the execution of its mission.

The Refugee Dream Center is dedicated to empowering refugees and immigrants in Rhode Island by providing access to resources, advocacy, and community support. Our work is rooted in a deep commitment to human dignity, safety, and belonging. The communities we serve are among those most vulnerable to hate crimes and bias incidents, and the Commission's work is directly aligned with our mission to ensure that every person in Rhode Island regardless of origin can live free from fear and discrimination.

Now, more than ever, the work of the Rhode Island Commission on Prejudice and Bias is imperative. We write today in strong support of state funding in the amount of \$100,000 to ensure the continuation of the Commission's vital work.

Sincerely,

Teddi Jallow
Executive Director
Refugee Dream Center