



**RHODE ISLAND WORKING FAMILIES PARTY**

Representative Robert Craven, Chair

House Judiciary Committee

Thursday March 3, 2022

**Support for H-7353, H-7354, H-7355, and H-7356, Relating to Criminal Justice**

Chairman Craven and Members of the Committee,

Rhode Island Working Families Party writes in strong support of H-7353, H-7354, H-7355, and H-7356, Representative Felix's bills to improve our criminal justice system.

The Working Families Party is committed to ensuring broadened opportunity for all, including those with criminal records. People who interact with our criminal justice system deserve to return to society without crushing debts or insurmountable records. Their family members, too, deserve not to have their futures dismantled because of a system that uses fines to define the severity of crimes assessed and to keep people behind bars. The four bills proposed by Rep. Felix, together, would move our state much closer to having a just, efficient, and effective criminal legal system for our neighbors and their families:

**H-7353 – No cash bail**

Prohibiting courts from setting cash or surety bail on misdemeanor offenses has become a national rallying cry. Cash bail, simply put, fosters modern-day debtors' prisons: about 60% of the people unable to post bail bonds fall within the bottom 1/3 of our income scale. The cash bail system creates a *de facto* harsher punishment for individuals and their families who cannot afford to pay. And it props up a pervasive debt system, as families often take out predatory loans in order to cover the costs and end up carrying the debts at length.

**H-7354 – Automatic record sealing**

Misdemeanors need not persist on one's record and potentially harm a person's employment and housing prospects, especially when the person has been acquitted or exonerated. Automatically sealing these records will assist working Rhode Islanders in all corners of our state to provide for themselves and their families.

**H-7355**

The legal severity of a felony should be premised on the length of the sentence, not the amount of the fine. Felonies have significant, long-lasting impacts on people's lives, and assigning

felonies in conjunction with high fines can doubly impact individuals and create near-insurmountable barriers to independently rejoining society.

**H-7356 – Codifying sentencing factors**

This act makes clear which factors a judge can consider in sentencing, including: the nature and circumstances of the offense; the history and characteristics of the defendant; the immigration status of the defendant; the potential for rehabilitation; the need for educational or vocational training; and the mandate that the court not impose a sentence that is greater than sufficient to promote respect for the law and provide deterrence to the defendant and others. Consistent standards for sentencing will help to decrease sentencing inequities across demographics.

These bills are reasonable, popular, broadly supported, and strengthen our criminal justice system. We strongly encourage passage of the entire slate, not just for the individuals themselves, but for the well-being of their impacted families and communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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Rhode Island Organizing Director  
Working Families Party