

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals

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May 9, 2024

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr., Chair
House Committee on Judiciary
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: 2024 – H 7523 – An Act Relating To Health And Safety -- Vital Records

Dear Chair Craven:

Please accept this letter of support of **H 7523** which provides an exemption for certain incarcerated persons from the payment of fees for a first request for vital statistic from the R.I. Department of Health (RIDOH).

Individuals who are reentering the community from incarceration face many obstacles to successfully remaining outside of the Department of Corrections. Successful reentry is highly dependent on the ability to acquire housing, employment, a driver's license, Medicaid, and other social support services necessary to survive in the community. This is particularly important for individuals who live with mental illness, substance use disorder and/or intellectual/developmental disabilities. Immediate transition to community treatment services, and to stable and safe housing upon release not only can reduce the risk of overdose deaths, but also can reduce exposure to social triggers and stressors for prisoners with any behavioral health disorder.

The inability to afford the fee to obtain a birth certificate and other vital records prevents these individuals from being able to provide the necessary documentation to access critical resources. By waiving the initial fee, this legislation will provide the recently incarcerated individual an opportunity to succeed and will help to prevent recidivism. Both the community and the individual who is experiencing reentry benefit from this worthwhile investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Leclerc'.

Richard Leclerc
Director

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary

The Honorable Leonela Felix
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy