

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



Department of Corrections

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The Honorable Robert E. Craven Sr.
House Committee on Judiciary
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

April 11, 2024

Re: H7966 – Relating to State Affairs and Government -- Corrections Department

Dear Chairperson Craven:

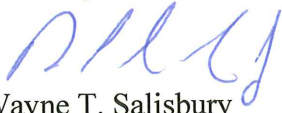
This evening the House Judiciary Committee will consider House Bill #7966. This bill would set standards and procedures to allow and implement conjugal visitation at state correctional facilities and direct the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) to establish and enforce rules and regulations governing conjugal visits. RIDOC is opposed to this legislation and has serious concerns with this legislation and how its implementation and practice will impact the safety and security of the Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI).

Visitation at a correctional facility is paramount to rehabilitation efforts for those incarcerated and vital to maintaining family ties. Visitation is also a primary method by which contraband including but not limited to cell phones, drugs, escape paraphernalia, weapons, currency, and gang related items is smuggled into our facilities. It is critical that RIDOC intentional monitor all visits to ensure the safety of its staff and the incarcerated population. Conjugal visits, which require extraordinary privacy, run contrary to best correctional practice. The private nature of such visits jeopardizes the safety and security of our institutions. Only four states in the entire country presently permit conjugal visits: California, Connecticut, New York, and Washington.

Beyond the associated safety and security risks to incarcerated persons, visitors, and correctional staff alike, the physical plant of the ACI and space allotted for visitation is not conducive to the allowance of conjugal visits. If the State of Rhode Island were to permit conjugal visits, the arrangement of such opportunities would be to the detriment to traditional visitation as such visits would need to be held at separate times than traditional visitation, thereby resulting in fewer hours of opportunity for such visits to occur at the expense of a limited number of conjugal visits. Furthermore, new construction for said facilities would be necessary along with additional Correctional Officer staffing.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,



Wayne T. Salisbury
Acting Director

cc: Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Representative Perez, Diaz, J. Lombardi, Fellela, O'Brien, Vella-Wilkinson,
Sanchez, and Lima
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House