

Good evening, chair and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I am here to advocate for H5349, motivated by personal experiences that underscore the urgent need for reform in expungement processes.

The current legal framework concerning expungement in Rhode Island is comprehensive, yet, when placed in the context of the broader U.S. landscape, it becomes evident that many states have embraced more progressive approaches. For instance, according to the Rights to Restoration Project, numerous states, including Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Washington D.C., Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia, offer automatic relief for a wide array of non-conviction records, encompassing both misdemeanors and felonies.

Conversely, Rhode Island is among nine states that necessitate individuals to request relief, which is subject to specific provisions. Massachusetts, for example, permits the sealing of non-conviction dispositions automatically upon a good cause standard—this occurs following acquittals and similar outcomes.

Implementing more streamlined expungement processes would significantly enhance opportunities for individuals seeking employment, housing, and other fundamental aspects of life that are unfairly hindered by past non-conviction records. Personally, I have encountered several dismissals that remain unremovable, underscoring the necessity for legislative change. I urge the committee to support S H5349 to facilitate a more equitable path for those seeking a second chance.

I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.