



April 3, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven Sr., Chair

House Judiciary Committee

Rhode island Statehouse

Providence, 02903

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 5124 - RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE -- THE
RHODE ISLAND FIRST STEP ACT**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we proudly support House Bill No. 5124, which advances social justice for all Rhode Islanders—especially those disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system. Through the ADVOCATE UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we are committed to dismantling systemic barriers and championing policies that promote racial, social, and economic justice across every community in our state.

House Bill No. 5124 is a vital step toward building a more inclusive Rhode Island. It recognizes that justice must extend beyond incarceration and into the reentry process. This bill invests in comprehensive supports for incarcerated individuals, including access to healthcare, education, case management, and workforce preparation. These services are essential to creating equitable pathways for successful reintegration and economic mobility—particularly for Black, Brown, and low-income Rhode Islanders who are disproportionately impacted by incarceration and structural barriers to opportunity.

According to the Economic Progress Institute, returning citizens are more than ten times as likely to experience homelessness and face unemployment rates nearly five times higher than the general population upon release (EPI, 2023). Additionally, federal data from the U.S. Department of Justice shows that individuals who reenter society without identification or access to benefits are significantly more likely to be reincarcerated within three years (DOJ, 2022). These statistics underscore the urgent need for coordinated reentry services like those proposed in this legislation.

Supporting House Bill No. 5124 ensures that every Rhode Islander—regardless of their past—has a fair chance to succeed. It affirms our belief in second chances, our commitment to community well-being,

[Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.](#)

and our responsibility to address the root causes of inequality. We urge you to support this legislation and help build a more just, inclusive, and thriving Rhode Island for all.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy

United Way Rhode Island