

Roberta DiMezza

From: Melonie Perez <melonie@daretowin.org>
Sent: Thursday, April 3, 2025 4:40 PM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: Support for Key Bills That Will Impact Incarcerated Individuals and Their Families

Dear Chairperson Representative Craven, Vice-Chair McEntee, and Esteemed Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for several important pieces of legislation that will have a profound and positive impact on incarcerated individuals and their families in Rhode Island. As a mother of an incarcerated son, I have personally witnessed the challenges and struggles that come with being involved in the criminal justice system. These bills are deeply personal to me, and I believe they represent a critical opportunity for meaningful reform in our state.

House Bill No. 5124 (The Rhode Island First Step Act):

It is vital that the Department of Corrections (DOC) does everything it can to ensure that individuals entrusted to its care are given the tools, resources, and support necessary for successful reintegration into society. Programs that offer counseling, medical care, education, and opportunities for early sentence termination are key to helping incarcerated individuals become rehabilitated and contributing members of society. The First Step Act offers hope for families like mine, knowing that our loved ones have a real chance at a better future.

House Resolution No. 5131 (A Special Legislative Commission to Study Healthcare Delivery at RIDOC):

This bill is crucial because far too many lives have been lost due to medical neglect and insufficient treatment while incarcerated. People are sentenced to years in prison, not death. It is heartbreaking to know that those in the custody of the DOC often face inadequate healthcare, which can lead to unnecessary suffering and, in some cases, death. This commission is an important step toward holding the DOC accountable for the care it provides to those who are incarcerated, ensuring that they receive the medical treatment they deserve as human beings.

House Bill No. 5350 (Communication Services for Inmates and Juveniles):

As a mother, I bear the financial burden of staying in touch with my son, especially when his earnings from his prison job are not enough to cover the high costs of phone calls. This bill would provide free communication services, enabling families like mine to stay connected without the financial hardship. The ability to maintain contact with loved ones is essential for an inmate's emotional well-being and rehabilitation, and I ask for your support in making this a reality.

House Bill No. 5362 (Sentencing Reconsideration Act):

Everyone deserves a second chance. This bill would allow rehabilitated individuals the opportunity to seek sentence reductions, providing them with a path forward and a chance to rebuild their lives. It is especially important for those who have shown genuine growth and remorse for their actions. For families like mine, this bill offers hope for a future where our loved ones can return home to be with us and contribute to society once again.

House Bill No. 5927 (Restrictive Confinement Oversight Act):

I have personally experienced the trauma of solitary confinement, and I can attest to the profound psychological damage it causes. The progress we've made in limiting the use of solitary confinement is a step in the right direction, but we must ensure that these positive changes are codified into law for the sake of all incarcerated individuals. This bill would provide the oversight necessary to ensure that restrictive housing is only used when absolutely necessary and in a manner that respects the dignity and well-being of those affected.

House Bill No. 5928 (Body Cameras for Correctional Facilities Act – The Willie Washington, Jr. Act):

This bill is incredibly personal to me, as I live in constant fear for the safety and well-being of my son, who is

incarcerated. If he becomes ill or is involved in an altercation, body cameras would provide much-needed accountability, ensuring that what happens behind closed doors is documented and transparent. It would protect both inmates and correctional officers by ensuring that all parties are held accountable for their actions. This simple step could help prevent injustice and provide families with peace of mind.

I believe that Rhode Island has the opportunity to lead the nation in criminal justice reform by passing these bills. We have the chance to set a powerful example of compassion, fairness, and rehabilitation—values that are at the heart of what makes our state great. I respectfully urge you to support these important pieces of legislation and to continue working toward a more just and humane system.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your commitment to making Rhode Island a leader in criminal justice reform.

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