

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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April 3, 2025

TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No. 5180

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINALS – CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS -- PAROLE

Chairman Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender supports HB5180, which would require one member of the Rhode Island Parole Board to be a formerly incarcerated person with a professional background in relevant fields and who has completed the probation and parole process at least three years prior. The inclusion of a person who has had directly experienced the parole process would support the board’s mission “to enhance public safety, contribute to the prudent use of public resources and consider the safe and successful reentry of offenders.”¹

A formerly incarcerated person with a professional background in any of the areas outlined in the proposed bill² would bring a unique perspective to the cases that the board considers for discretionary parole. Their lived experience with the realities of incarceration, the challenges of reintegration, and the factors that contribute to recidivism would provide valuable insight in evaluating parole cases.

Governor McKee’s 2021 appointment of a formerly incarcerated social worker to the Parole Board was praised by a former Rhode Island Parole Board member as an “inspiring” decision that could “lead to a more enlightened approach to parole and criminal justice.”³ Enacting the proposed legislation would ensure that the perspective offered by those who have been directly impacted by the parole system continues to be incorporated. This will foster more informed and compassionate decisions about an inmate’s suitability for parole, and enhance trust between the justice system and the communities it serves.

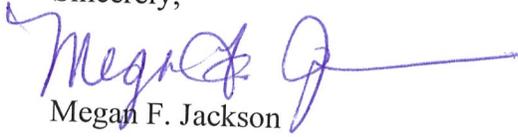
The Office of the Public Defender urges the Judiciary Committee to support HB5180.

¹ <https://paroleboard.ri.gov>, last accessed 4/2/25.

² Those areas include psychology, mental health and/or substance use, transitional housing, re-entry after incarceration, education or law. SB292.

³ Mulvaney, Katie. “Gov. McKee names first formerly incarcerated person to RI Parole Board.” Providence Journal, Nov. 19, 2021, available at: <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/courts/2021/11/19/ri-parole-board-adds-former-prisoner-first-time/8667240002/>, (last accessed 4/2/25).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Megan F. Jackson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Megan F. Jackson

Legislative Liaison

Office of the Public Defender

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