



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 5349-- RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- VITAL RECORDS**

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we express our strong support for House Bill 5349, recognizing that healthcare is an essential component of a thriving life and a key driver of economic stability. Through the LIFT UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we work to ensure that all Rhode Islanders—regardless of income—have access to the healthcare services they need to live healthy, stable, and productive lives. Without access to quality healthcare, individuals and families face deeper financial hardship, workforce instability, and barriers to reentry after incarceration.

House Bill 5349 removes a critical administrative and financial obstacle by allowing incarcerated individuals to receive their first request for vital records free of charge. For individuals preparing to reenter society, access to birth certificates and other legal documents is often the first step toward securing employment, applying for healthcare, enrolling in housing programs, and restoring stability. Removing this cost—particularly for those with little to no income—helps break cycles of poverty and incarceration.

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). Federal data further shows that returning individuals without identification or access to benefits are significantly more likely to recidivate within three years (U.S. Department of Justice, 2022). Eliminating the financial barrier to vital records is a small but powerful

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

step in addressing these compounding challenges.

Healthcare access—and the documentation needed to access it—is not a luxury; it is a basic right and a public good. House Bill 5349 supports equity and economic mobility by ensuring that no Rhode Islander is denied the opportunity to rebuild simply because they cannot afford a document. We urge your support for this legislation to create a more just, stable, and inclusive Rhode Island for all.

Sincerely,

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