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April 10, 2025

Dear members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing in strong support of Bill HB5724, which seeks to provide much-needed protections for undocumented immigrants in Rhode Island. As the grandchild of immigrants and as an immigrant myself, I understand firsthand that many who come to this country do so with the simple dream of working hard and building a better future for their families. Today, in my professional work, I engage closely with immigrant families and witness their struggles daily. Although I am a U.S. citizen, I too share the fear of ICE enforcement and its inhumane treatment of immigrants.

Many undocumented individuals in Rhode Island arrived in the U.S. through parole programs that legally allowed them entry, but once here, they are burdened with finding legal representation—a financial barrier that many simply cannot overcome. These individuals deserve to stay in the country because they contribute to our economy and society while fleeing violence and economic instability in their home countries. It is unjust to criminalize people whose only goal is to work and provide for their families.

Beyond these barriers, immigrants detained by ICE face egregious abuses. Reports from detainees include racist and anti-immigrant ridicule, ignored grievances, and fears of retaliation for speaking out. Retaliatory measures include 24-hour lockdowns, isolation, and restricted communication with the outside world. In 2020, sixty hunger strikers were punished through cut-off phone access and solitary confinement. Just this past month, AMOR, a non-profit where I volunteer, received reports that the Wyatt Center has been arbitrarily limiting legal program access. In the first two weeks of March alone, six detainees reported discrimination, and four explicitly stated they were treated "like animals."

One detainee, in a message received in March 2025, described the experience:

"They left us incommunicado for two weeks, and they lock us up when the lawyers are about to come. Also, when they (inmates) fight in another unit, even if it's not an immigration unit, they (staff) lock us up and yell at us... there is a lot of racism. I wanted to report that to a sergeant, and he got to my cell when I wanted to tell him, and he closed the door on my face."

This pattern of mistreatment and suppression of immigrant voices must end. Passing Bill HB5724 is a critical step toward ensuring that Rhode Island does not participate in the unjust detention and deportation of people who came here in search of safety and opportunity. Instead, we must work toward an immigration system that prioritizes human dignity, due process, and fair access to legal representation.

I urge you to stand on the right side of history and vote in favor of Bill HB5724. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

