

Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 5724

Submitted by Kaden Paulson-Smith of Providence, RI

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

MEETING: Thursday, April 10, 2025, State House

Roberta DiMezza, Committee Clerk, HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov

Distinguished members of the committee,

I urge you to pass House Bill No. 5724, which would prohibit state and municipal contracts for detaining individuals for civil immigration violations. This critical legislation represents a necessary step toward ending the inhumane practice of immigration detention in our state.

The Wyatt Detention Center's contract with ICE has made Rhode Island complicit in a system that subjects vulnerable individuals to dehumanizing conditions and medical neglect. On April 4, 2020, 60 people detained by ICE at Wyatt launched a hunger strike demanding safer conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The response was not compassion or improved care, but retaliation—cutting off phone access and placing strikers in isolation. This is merely one example in Wyatt's long history of neglect and mistreatment.

It is morally indefensible for Central Falls—a community with a significant immigrant population—to rely on detention as a form of economic development. This approach not only contradicts our values but has proven to be a financial burden on the city. Rather than investing in prisons, we should focus resources on community support and economic opportunities that benefit all residents.

The conditions at Wyatt are particularly disturbing: unsanitary facilities, inadequate medical care, limited communication with the outside world, and reports of racist and anti-immigrant ridicule from prison administrators. Detainees who attempt to communicate grievances face threats of punitive reprisal. These conditions violate basic human dignity and rights.

Rhode Island has the opportunity to join other states across the country that have banned municipalities from using their prisons as ICE detention centers. By prohibiting these Intergovernmental Service Agreements, we would effectively eliminate immigration detention in our state and take a meaningful step toward closing the Wyatt Detention Center.

People navigating the challenging process of immigration should be able to do so with their families and in their communities, not behind bars. The majority of those in detention have established lives in the United States, with families and community ties.

I strongly urge you to pass House Bill No. 5724 and end Rhode Island's participation in this unjust system of immigration detention by July 1, 2026. This is not merely a policy decision but a moral imperative that reflects our values as Rhode Islanders who believe in justice, dignity, and compassion for all people.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kaden Paulson-Smith', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kaden Paulson-Smith, Ph.D.

Resident of Providence, RI