

Dear Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

I am writing in support of HB-5724 as a concerned citizen of Providence. If this legislation were to pass, Rhode Island would join numerous other cities and states across the country who have outlawed the use of municipal jails and prisons as ICE detention centers. These detention centers have a long and well documented history of abuses and human rights violations. The collaboration between local police, government officials, and ICE can not continue. I urge you to make sure Rhode Island is on the right side of history by passing HB-5724, taking a crucial step towards banning all city and state government contracts with ICE and DHS.

Passing this legislation is especially important because Rhode Island is unfortunately home to one of the region's most notorious and inhumane ICE detention centers: the Wyatt Detention Center in Central Falls. In 2009, Hiu Lui "Jason" Ng died at the Wyatt due to gross medical neglect and abuse at the hands of prison administrators. Ng's death is just one example of how the Wyatt operates with a sadistic culture, exhibiting a long history of neglect, insanitary conditions, and abuse.

The Wyatt imprisons hundreds of immigrants through its Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) with ICE. These immigrants represent a huge proportion of the RI population. They are our family, friends, and neighbors, and are deserving of humane treatment and freedom. If these IGSA contracts with ICE persist, the state government will continue to work against the values of a majority of its citizens. By prohibiting IGSA contracts (that allow ICE to use state and local resources for detention), RI would effectively eliminate immigration detention in the state.

I give this testimony as not only a concerned citizen, but also a teacher and professor at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Tufts University. The decades-long history of ICE attacks against our undocumented community in Rhode Island should be more than enough to compel you to vote in favor of HB-5724. However, Trump and his administration have significantly broadened the scope of these attacks on immigrants. He has emboldened the so called Department of Homeland Security to go after student visa and green card holders too, putting many of my students and colleagues at risk of arrest, detention, and deportation. Just a few weeks ago, Rümeyza Öztürk, a Tufts graduate student worker in my union, SEIU 509, was abducted by unmarked, masked ICE agents and is still in detention. These attacks are just going to increase in frequency.

Passing HB-5724 is an opportunity to say loud and clear to our RI community as well as ICE and Trump, that immigrants are welcome here in RI and we will not stand for these attacks!

Thank you for your time,  
Tycho Horan  
RISD Professor