



*District Court of Rhode Island
Garrahy Judicial Complex
One Barrance Plaza
Providence, RI 02903*

JEANNE E. LaFAZIA
CHIEF JUDGE

May 1, 2025

**Chairman and Members
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI**

**Re: Impact Statement
Bill No. H6286**

Dear Chairman and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I write to you today on behalf of the Rhode Island District Court to advise of a previously unforeseen impact of RIGL § 8-8-1.3, §12-29-3, requiring trained solicitors to handle domestic violence cases at arraignment, effective July 1, 2025.

Let me begin by stating that the District Court fully supports and applauds the requirement for additional training for all prosecutors and attorneys handling these sensitive and complex matters. We have been advised that a training curriculum has been established and that classes are proceeding on schedule so that all individuals may meet the statute's implementation deadline for training. We welcome having city solicitors or attorneys from the Office of the Attorney General present at the arraignment stage. However, as is sometimes the case with well-intentioned legislation, there are potential unintended consequences that I wish to bring to your attention. We have now been advised that the Cities and Towns have not hired additional solicitors to cover the arraignment courtrooms. The District Court is concerned about this anticipated lack of prosecutorial presence at daily domestic violence arraignments, a development that may significantly impede the functioning of our courts. This concern is grounded in several critical facts:

- In 2024, the Office of the Attorney General did not receive the additional funding or positions requested to cover the arraignment of domestic abuse cases filed in District Court.
- Our 39 municipalities, which currently rely on police officers to present cases at arraignment, will now be required to provide solicitors for this function—an obligation that requires additional funding and staffing by these cities and towns. We have however been advised that this additional funding and staffing has not been achieved.

The District Court operates a minimum of five daily arraignment calendars across our four counties. In 2024 alone, 4,251 domestic abuse cases were filed in District Court, comprising 17.81% of the 23,872 arraignments for the calendar year. Police officers have historically appeared at arraignments on

behalf of their respective towns, and municipal solicitors have typically assumed responsibility afterward. With few exceptions, most city solicitors come to District Court one day each week for pre-trials and trials. Under the new statute solicitors will now be required at the arraignment.

Unless or until municipalities hire and deploy additional solicitors to be present at arraignments, the system will experience significant delays. These delays will impact not only the courts, but also sheriffs, police departments, the Department of the Attorney General, the Public Defender's Office, the Department of Corrections, and—most critically—the defendants themselves.

For example, many cases involving violations of no-contact orders are accompanied by violations of probation (32F) or bail (46G), which often result in holding a defendant without bail at presentment. These matters are frequently resolved at arraignment with input from the Attorney General's Office, police prosecutors, and defense counsel, often resulting in non-custodial resolutions. Under the new law, however, the court cannot begin the arraignment process without a solicitor present. This means defendants may be held in courthouse cell blocks, local police departments, or the ACI, potentially overnight or through a weekend, until a city solicitor can be present in court.

In addition to the human and logistical cost of these delays, there are operational concerns. District Court staff are tasked with processing all necessary paperwork, most critically, no-contact orders, on the same day as the hearing. Delays in arraignment push this work to the end of the day, requiring overtime, increasing error risks, and potentially jeopardizing public safety by delaying entry of no-contact orders into RONCO.

There may also be financial implications. Any delay in arraignments or in the processing of cases increases costs to the state and municipalities at a time of considerable budgetary uncertainty.

To be clear, we fully support the spirit and intent of this statute. Specialized training in domestic violence prosecution is crucial. However, we respectfully urge the General Assembly to consider the operational challenges that will arise if additional solicitors are not covering the arraignment courtrooms.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Respectfully,



Hon. Jeanne E. LaFazia
Chief Judge
Rhode Island District Court

Cc: Justin Correa, Staff Attorney, Office of the General Counsel
Chrisanne Wyrzykowski, Esq. Office of the General Counsel