



**March 2, 2026**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY**

**Rhode Island State House Providence, RI 02903**

**RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill NO H7198 ~ AN ACT RELATING TO RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES**

Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

Good afternoon. My name is Diana Garlington, and I serve as the Policy Program Officer at United Way of Rhode Island. In this role, I work closely with community-based organizations, funders, and public partners to analyze how state policy decisions affect nonprofit sustainability, community safety, youth opportunity, and equitable access to resources.

I am here in strong support of House Bill 7198

At United Way, our mission is rooted in strengthening families, stabilizing communities, and advancing racial and economic equity. Through the PVD Equity Fund and our broader policy initiatives, I see firsthand how legislative decisions shape real outcomes, from workforce stability to youth engagement to public safety systems. H7198 represent thoughtful policy that addresses structural gaps within our system. Policies like these are not abstract, they influence whether families can rebuild after system involvement, whether young people have fair pathways forward, and whether community-based organizations can effectively partner with the state.

As Policy Program Officer, my work involves:

- Tracking legislation that impacts vulnerable populations
- Supporting nonprofits in understanding how state decisions affect their funding and operations

- Strengthening advocacy capacity among community partners
- Connecting lived experience to legislative action

Through that lens, I see these bills as aligned with a prevention-focused, equity-centered approach to public policy.

When policy improves transparency, reduces unnecessary barriers, or modernizes outdated processes, it strengthens community trust and reduces long-term social costs. Systems that operate fairly and efficiently reduce strain on nonprofits, decrease recidivism risk, and improve economic mobility outcomes.

United Way believes strong systems create strong families. Legislation that removes systemic barriers and promotes fairness contributes directly to:

- Workforce participation
- Housing stability
- Youth engagement and diversion
- Reduced strain on emergency systems

In my daily work with nonprofit leaders across Providence and beyond, I hear consistent themes: communities need policies that prevent harm rather than compound it. H7198 moves us closer to that goal.

This is not simply a criminal procedure issue or administrative adjustment — it is a community stability issue. It is an economic mobility issue. It is a racial equity issue.

As a Policy Program Officer, I am committed to advancing legislation that strengthens the ecosystem between state government and community organizations. These bills support that alignment. For those reasons, I respectfully urge you to support H7198.

Thank you for your leadership and your consideration.

**Diana Garlington**

Policy Program Officer,  
United Way of Rhode Island