



March 4, 2026

Dear Chairwoman and Committee Members,

My name is Juan Pablo Ocampo and I'm the Coordinator for the Immigrant Coalition of Rhode Island. On behalf of the Immigrant Coalition and our 44 member organizations, I ask this Committee to support House Bill 7198.

Under federal law, convictions that may be punishable by a year or more in prison can lead to detention, denial of necessary forms of immigration relief, and deportation for immigrants. Because all misdemeanors in Rhode Island carry a potential sentence of up to one year, this unintended one-day overlap in these statutes means that even first-time misdemeanors for which a person received no jail sentence at all can trigger deportation. By making a one-day change in the definition of "misdemeanor," this bill would protect hundreds of Rhode Islanders from cruel immigration consequences.

We need to address the current bias that treats an immigrant so differently from a citizen. Is it fair for immigrants to face significantly harsher penalties than a citizen for the same misdemeanor? Is it fair for an asylum seeker or a victim of domestic violence to be barred from immigration relief due to a misdemeanor? Of course not. And this bill takes a significant step toward mitigating that unfairness.

The Coalition understands passing this bill will have no unintended negative consequences. Due to federal law, a conviction for controlled substance, firearm offenses, child abuse, or domestic violence, would still trigger grounds for removal.

States like New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and New Mexico have already defined a misdemeanor to carry a maximum sentence of less than one year. We urge this Committee to stand with us on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Juan Pablo Ocampo Sheen, Coordinator
c/o Immigrant Coalition of Rhode Island
immigrantcoalitionri@gmail.com



IMMIGRANT COALITION OF RHODE ISLAND

THE IMMIGRANT COALITION OF RHODE ISLAND MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island (ACLU RI)
AMOR: Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance
Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE)
Center for Justice RI
Coalition for a Multilingual RI (CMRI)
Coalition of Advocates for Student Opportunities (CASO)
Conexión Latina Newport
Connecting for Children and Families
Crossroads
DARE: Direct Action For Rights And Equality
Diocese of Providence
Domestic Violence Resource Center of South County (DVRCSO)
Dorcas International Institute
Economic Progress Institute
Elmwood Avenue Church of God Refugee Relief
First Unitarian Church of Providence
Sanctuary Group
Family Service of Rhode Island (FSRI)
Fuerza Laboral
International House of Rhode Island
Latino Policy Institute
Lawyers' Committee for Rhode Island
New Bridges for Haitian Success
Olneyville Neighborhood Association (ONA)
Olneyville Resilience Hub
Oasis International
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
Progreso Latino
Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)
Refugee Dream Center
Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV)
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
RI Coalition for Children and Families
RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty
RI State Council of Churches
RWU Immigration Law Clinic

RWU Pro Bono Collaborative
SEIU RI State Council
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
Sojourner House
Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice
The Board of Rabbis of Greater Rhode Island
The Jewish Alliance of Greater RI
The Learning Community Charter School
The Liberian Community Association
Truth in Immigration Project