



Conexion Latina Newport
170 Broadway Newport, RI 02840
401-585-8165

To: House Judiciary Committee
From: Yolanda Macias, Associate Manager & Co-Founder, Conexion Latina Newport
Date: March 4, 2026
Re: Bill H 7198

Dear Chairman and Honorable Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Conexion Latina Newport, I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 7198, which would change the maximum prison sentence for a misdemeanor offense from one year to 364 days.

Conexion Latina works closely with immigrant and Spanish-speaking families across Rhode Island, providing support with education, workforce development, benefits navigation, and access to basic needs. Through our work, we regularly see how even minor interactions with the criminal legal system can have devastating and disproportionate consequences for immigrants and their families.

Under federal immigration law, certain misdemeanor convictions that carry a potential sentence of one year or more can trigger severe consequences, including mandatory detention, denial of immigration relief, and deportation. These consequences often apply even when the actual sentence imposed is far less. A one-day change in the statutory maximum sentence—from 365 days to 364—can mean the difference between a family staying together or being permanently separated.

Importantly, this bill does not prevent accountability. Judges would still retain full discretion to impose sentences of up to 364 days. H 7198 simply ensures that minor misdemeanor offenses do not automatically trigger extreme immigration penalties that go far beyond what was intended at the state level.

This change would particularly protect vulnerable members of our community, including asylum seekers, survivors of domestic violence, and longtime residents who are working, paying taxes, and contributing to our state. For many of them, a misdemeanor conviction—sometimes

stemming from a moment of hardship or misunderstanding—can result in life-altering immigration consequences.

Other states, including New York, Washington, and Nevada, have already taken this practical and compassionate step to align their criminal codes in a way that protects residents from unnecessarily harsh federal immigration consequences. Rhode Island should do the same.

We respectfully urge the Committee to approve H 7198 and help protect immigrant families in our state from disproportionate and unintended consequences tied to minor offenses.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and consideration.

Respectfully,

Yolanda Macias
Associate Manager & Co-Founder
Conexion Latina Newport