



March 4, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee, Chair
House Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL H 7360 – PROTECT OUR COURTS ACT

Chair McEntee and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we strongly support **H 7360, the Protect Our Courts Act**. This bill would protect individuals attending Rhode Island court proceedings—including parties, witnesses, and certain family or household members—from civil arrest while traveling to, remaining at, and returning from court, unless the arrest is supported by a judicial warrant or judicial order. It also establishes enforcement mechanisms and remedies for violations.

United Way's policy and advocacy work is guided by our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. Under our **Strong Families** pillar, we support policies that strengthen household stability and reduce barriers to opportunity. Access to the courts is foundational to family stability. Whether an individual is seeking protection, resolving a housing or family matter, or appearing as a witness, the justice system must remain accessible, credible, and safe.

The need for this protection is clear. Research has documented a chilling effect when people fear civil immigration enforcement at or near courthouses, including reduced willingness to report crimes, cooperate with legal proceedings, and appear in court. The ACLU has reported that courthouse enforcement activity stops many individuals from coming to court or even contacting law enforcement in the first place, undermining both equal access to justice and public safety.

A 2019 survey commissioned by the Immigrant Defense Project found that fear of ICE courthouse arrests led many respondents to avoid attending a wide range of court hearings, creating direct barriers to due process and court participation. These impacts are especially harmful for victims, survivors, and witnesses. When people are deterred from appearing in court, families lose access to protection and due process, and courts are less able to function as intended.

H 7360 is a clear and targeted response. By assuring that individuals will not suffer a civil arrest unless there is a judicial warrant or order, the bill helps protect court access, strengthens public confidence in the justice system, and supports the fair administration of justice for all Rhode Islanders.



United Way of Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for **H 7360**. Protecting access to the courts strengthens family stability, supports public safety, and helps ensure Rhode Island's justice system works as intended for everyone.

Sincerely,

Elijah McLean

Manager, Government Relations & Policy

United Way of Rhode Island