



WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Bill No.: HB7360
An Act Relating to Criminal Procedure – Protect Our Courts Act
Primary Sponsors: Senators Batista, Knight, Speakman, Cruz, Felix, Tanzi, Morales, McEntee, Diaz, and Potter
Committee: House Judiciary Committee
Date: March 4, 2026

The Rhode Island Women’s Bar Association (“RIWBA”) supports this bill. RIWBA is a non-profit organization that promotes the advancement of the status of women in the State of Rhode Island and in the legal profession.

The purpose of the Protect Our Courts Act is to protect people attending Rhode Island court proceedings from civil arrest without a judicial warrant, ensure court access, set enforcement rules, and provide remedies for violations.

This Act has emerged as a protective step necessary and advisable to protect all persons traveling to, in attendance at, and leaving a courthouse, as a party, witness or in which a family or household member is a party or witness, from unlawful arrest by both legitimate and claimed police authorities and more specifically, those acting under the auspices of immigration authorities. The current climate in public spaces in the country, owing largely to the overzealous methods of immigration officers, both those of legitimate and of questionable authority, has created a culture of fear for individual personal security. This fear has the potential to prevent/dissuade otherwise necessary and helpful persons to court proceedings from attending. The result is that court proceedings may not go forward or when they do, that the integrity of those proceedings are jeopardized. If necessary parties and witnesses are absent for fear of being taken by immigration officials, the legitimate and vital work of our court systems will be frustrated.

RIWBA strongly supports the goals of the Protect Our Courts Act. After reviewing the draft of the bill, we offer the following comments for your consideration:

1. While the meaning of “a judicial order issued” (p. 2, line 3) contemplates that order would be appropriately signed, given our awareness of recent ICE tactics (such as presenting unsigned warrants or warrants signed by those who are neither judges nor authorized court personnel), query whether “judicial order” (p. 3, line 15) makes clear that these orders are in fact signed by a judge or authorized court personnel, or whether language would benefit from the addition of “fully executed” judicial warrant or judicial order? Is it possible the addition of this language, however, would somehow interfere with current legitimate efficient warrants and order procedures or courts?
2. Given the range of courts and variety of court personnel employed by them, if it necessary or possible to identify who will file the incident or occurrence report? (p. 3, line 16).

In essence, RIWBA supports this bill to fully realize the goal of enabling people to participate in the legal system without intimidation. For these reasons, RIWBA respectfully urges the Committee to favorably consider this bill.

RIWBA contact:
Legislative and Policy Committee Chair, Jennifer L. Sylvia
riwbalegiscomm@gmail.com