

RHODE ISLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

3/4/27

Re: Testimony in Support of House bill HB-7436

Dear Chairperson and members of the Judicial Committee:

I urge you to vote in favor of bill HB-7436

My name is Bernard Dolan and I'm a Rhode Island poet and hip hop artist, who's been touring and releasing music since 2005 under the stage name B. Dolan. I'm here today to speak on behalf of my neighbors in Central Falls with the AMOR Network, in support of Rep Giraldo's Bill HB-7436, that would prohibit state and municipal officials from entering into and renewing any agreements that will be used to detain individuals for federal civil immigration violations.

Since 2018 my fellow citizens have extensively laid out the record of cruel and unusual punishment at the Wyatt Detention Center. The Wyatt is not just a morally bankrupt facility it is also a financial failure and a blight on the city being forced to live in its shadow.

Before I started touring in 2005, my last job was at a Tides charter school in Central Falls. I met kids from those neighborhoods who were as talented as any national performers, and was briefly hired as part of a project to build an art center, along the lines of what AS220 did briefly with its Broad Street Studio. Ultimately the funding for that project fell apart. The details of missed opportunities in Central Falls are many, but that's one I saw firsthand. I've always blamed a lack of imagination for those failures.

Lack of imagination for a struggling city 26 years ago, with a majority black and brown community, decided that detaining immigrants while turning over valuable property to out of state private prison investors, would be a great way to provide financial benefit to the city. The opposite has played out over the Wyatt's history.

"Revenue from the facility was first to be used for operation, second, to pay over \$100 million in bonds. Third, the city would gain any revenue if the revenues exceeded those amounts." Over the next 12 years, the city received a paltry \$5.3 million in impact fees, followed by its last regular payment of \$134,358 in 2009, over a decade and a half ago.

In 2020 the Wyatt received 2.9 million in taxpayer backed funding meant for COVID recovery, yet in 2021 their debt rose to 2.3 million. All while overcharging prisoners for phonecalls and bottles of clean water. In 2022 the city requested payment and was denied. As of 2023, bondholders continue to deny the release of funds for payment to the city. When the city of Central Falls tried to exercise its oversight ability and remove ICE from the Wyatt, bondholders sued the city for \$130 million in damages. That's how the experiment of privatizing and incentivizing detention has paid off for Rhode Islanders.

The Wyatt hasn't provided any economic benefit to Central Falls for more than a decade. Meanwhile if any number of businesses or schools replaced the Wyatt, not only would the city gain property tax on that institution that it could use for social

programs-to keep people from landing in prison-it would invite opportunity and investment to the city rather than being a symbol of abuse and cruelty.

A 2024 summary of fiscal impact report valued the amount of taxes the Wyatt would have to pay at roughly \$1.1 million. House Bill 7461 asks for 27% of that tax to be paid to the city of Central Falls (\$284,277). Looking at the past impact fees from 2017 and 2021: they are mere fractions of what they owe. The presence of the Wyatt puts the burden of failed out-of-state investors on a vulnerable community. It eliminates any amount of property taxes the city could earn with a business in its place, and the development of the entire area.

I'll be present today and submitting this testimony, asking us to uphold the values this immigrant colony was founded on, and imagine a better investment in the people of Rhode Island and Central Falls in place of the failed Wyatt Detention Center and ICE.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of bill HB-7436. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Bernard Dolan
House District 47