

Ariana Costa

From: Acadia Smith <cadis045@gmail.com>
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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Cade Smith, and I am here today in strong support of House Bill H-7436.

I am a relatively new Rhode Islander, having moved here in 2024 from Northern Virginia. I grew up in a single-parent household where we moved from apartment to apartment until we found home in a small cul-de-sac called Abingdon Court. It was there that my world opened up. I was raised by a village: the Miranda family from El Salvador, the Abu-Fadels from Lebanon, and the Butlers, who—interestingly enough—originally called Providence home.

These families didn't just live next to me; they shaped me. Seeing our once small, fragile town blossom into the bustling, culturally dense community it is now—thanks to the deep roots of old families and the new energy of our immigrant neighbors—is why I stand before you today. I see myself as a bridge between those who built our foundations and those who are now building our future.

But that future is under threat. I have seen the community that raised me paralyzed by fear. I've watched videos of workers detained at the very same Walmart where my mother and I used to shop late at night because it was all we could afford. My friends tell me their families are terrified to leave their homes, fearing they will be snatched off the street simply because of how they look or where they come from. It breaks my heart to see these same atrocities happening here in my new home. In Rhode Island, we see individuals detained at courthouses and hospitals—the very places meant to provide justice and healing.

While organizations like the AMOR Network have done incredible work to organize and protect our neighbors, they cannot do it alone. H-7436 is a necessary step to rebuild a sense of safety. By prohibiting municipalities from contracting with ICE, we specifically address the shadow cast by the Wyatt Detention Facility.

We cannot claim to value 'community' while simultaneously profiting from the detention and displacement of our neighbors. It is a fundamental contradiction of Rhode Island's values.

You sit in these seats because of your constituents—people like the Mirandas, the Abu-Fadels, and the Butlers. Whether you are here for a lifelong career in service or to make a specific change, your legacy will be defined by whether you protected your people or allowed them to be targeted.

I urge you to support H-7436. As my mother always told me: 'This is not a threat; it is a promise'—a promise to hold our leaders accountable to the communities they represent.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.