



Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education

Organizational Testimony in Support of H7436

March 4, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE) submits this testimony in strong support of H7436, which would prohibit Rhode Island from contracting to detain individuals for federal civil immigration violations.

ARISE was founded by Southeast Asian refugees and descendants. Our families know what detention, displacement, and state violence mean across generations. We organize so that immigrant and refugee communities in Rhode Island can live with dignity, safety, and belonging.

Our immigrant communities deserve to feel safe and valued — not surveilled, detained, or used as revenue streams.

The Wyatt Detention Center is the only facility in Rhode Island that detains immigrants through its Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) with ICE. That contract allows federal immigration enforcement to use state and local infrastructure to incarcerate people for civil immigration matters. If Rhode Island ends these contracts, immigration detention in our state ends.

We should take that opportunity.

The Wyatt has a documented history of neglect and abuse. In 2020, 60 people detained by ICE launched a hunger strike to demand safer conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic — and were met with retaliation, including isolation and restricted phone access. In 2025, detainees reported denial of critical medications for conditions such as brain cancer and sickle cell disease, unsanitary water causing illness, and sexual assault allegations. Families are charged exploitative rates just to stay in contact — \$0.25 per text message, \$2 per bottle of water. These practices are not aligned with Rhode Island's values.

Immigration detention is a civil system — not criminal punishment — yet people are held in prison-like conditions, separated from families, deprived of care, and subjected to abuse. Nationally, over 310,000 people were detained in FY2025, and deaths in ICE custody reached an all-time high. We should not contribute to expanding that system.

Nor should any city rely on detention as economic development. The Wyatt does not pay property taxes to Central Falls, depriving the city of revenue that could fund essential services. A different use of that land would generate greater public benefit. Public institutions should not depend on incarcerating immigrants to stabilize shrinking budgets.

Detention centers like the Wyatt provide ICE with the infrastructure it needs to carry out mass detention. ICE cannot operate without cooperation from prisons and private companies. If Rhode Island withdraws that cooperation, we take a concrete step toward protecting our neighbors.

States across the country — including Illinois, Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota, and Oregon — have already passed legislation banning ICE contracts in state and municipal facilities. Rhode Island can join them in affirming that civil immigration enforcement should not depend on our public infrastructure.

We work daily with Southeast Asian and immigrant youth whose families carry fear of detention and deportation. That fear shapes how children show up in classrooms, how parents interact with institutions, and how entire communities experience public life. When our state contracts to detain immigrants for civil status violations, it communicates that some Rhode Islanders are expendable.

H7436 says otherwise.

This bill affirms that Rhode Island will not use its public resources to cage immigrants navigating civil immigration proceedings. It moves us closer to a state where immigrant communities can feel safe, valued, and rooted.

We urge you to pass H7436.