

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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March 3, 2026

TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Joint Resolution No. 8121

ENTITLED, JOINT RESOLUTION CREATING THE IMMIGRANT IMPACT TASK FORCE

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

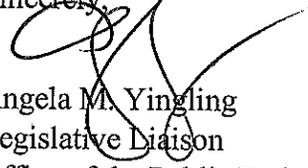
The Office of the Public Defender **supports** HJR8121, which would create an eleven-member task force to track and oversee immigration and support actions in Rhode Island. It is no secret that the recent heavy-handed tactics of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) division of the federal Department of Homeland Security have caused chaos and raised serious concerns across the country.¹

In Rhode Island specifically, there have been two recent incidents involving ICE that have been directly related to state courthouses, places where we advocate for our clients every day. First, on November 20, 2025, ICE officials surrounded the car of Superior Court Justice Joseph McBurney outside of the Licht Judicial Complex and threatened to smash his windows as he was about to give his high-school-aged intern a ride home. Next, on January 15, 2026, ICE agents barreled through the security measures at the Garrahy Judicial Complex in pursuit of two young men, ignoring the local authorities' instructions to stop.

The Public Defender's Office represents a wide variety of Rhode Islanders, regardless of immigration status. Accordingly, we are directly interested in the state's response to ICE's actions. Many bills have been introduced to address these concerns, but the Public Defender's Office respectfully suggests that the best way to approach this problem would be the creation of a task force, which would allow each of the ideas to be given due consideration by the stakeholders and any constitutional questions to be researched and addressed. Accordingly, the Office of the Public Defender **supports** the passage of HJR8121 and the creation of an Immigration Task Force.

¹ See, e.g., Shalia Dewan, *'It's just all going down the toilet': Police chiefs fume at ICE tactics*, New York Times (Jan. 20, 2026), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/30/us/its-all-just-going-down-the-toilet-police-chiefs-fume-at-ice-tactics.html>; Brian Crandall, *Leaders praise judge, hammer ICE over courthouse incident in Providence*, Channel 10 WJAR News (Nov. 21, 2025), available at <https://turnto10.com/i-team/leaders-praise-judge-hammer-ice-over-courthouse-intern-incident-in-providence-november-21-2025>; Katie Mulvaney, *I was afraid I was going to get shot': ICE pursuit into RI courthouse causes chaos*, The Providence Journal (Jan. 15, 2026), available at <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/crime/2026/01/15/ice-agents-rhode-island-courthouse-pursuit/88201358007/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AYINGLING', written over the printed name.

Angela M. Yingling
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