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March 17, 2026

TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No. 7034

ENTITLED, ACTS RELATING TO PROPERTY—RHODE ISLAND FAIR HOUSING PRACTICES ACT

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **strongly supports** House Bill No. 7034, which would prohibit landlords from inquiring about applicants' prior incarceration and from discriminating against those recently released from prison.

Finding housing is of the most difficult aspects of reentering society after a prison sentence, but it is also one of the most important in terms of preventing recidivism. Bodies as august as the American Academy of Political and Social Science (AAPSS) have stated, "Housing is arguably the most important element of reentry."¹ This bill would play a crucial role in ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their justice-involved background, have equal access to safe and affordable housing. Most people who leave prison think, "I **NEVER** want to go back there again." Indeed, reentry is the moment that many people are the *most* motivated to build a better life—but they need the tools to do it.

Therefore, it is in *all* of our interests to make sure that recently released individuals have the chance to succeed. As the AAPSS puts it, "Housing is critical to employment, substance use recovery, and successfully completing parole or probation—all critical for reentry."² People who have served their time should be given a chance to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities. Denying them access to housing due to their past mistakes only perpetuates cycles of poverty, recidivism, and instability.

In addition, we must remember that housing is a family issue. A lack of housing negatively impacts the entire family's safety, health, educational opportunities, and development. Every child of a formerly incarcerated parent deserves to grow up in a stable housing situation; it is one of the

¹ Augustine D & Kushel M., *Community Supervision, Housing Insecurity, & Homelessness* 701 Ann. Am. Acad. Pol. Soc. Sci. (1) 152-171 (May 2022).

² *Id.*

best ways to ensure they can break the cycles of crime and violence that are all-too-common in our society.

As H7034 represents an essential step toward promoting rehabilitation and reintegration, we strongly encourage the committee to support its passage.

Sincerely,

/s/ Angela M. Yingling

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