

Written Testimony in Support of House Bill H8058

To: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island House of Representatives

Re: House Bill H8058 – Position: Support

Dear Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I write in strong support of House Bill H8058. My understanding of this legislation is that it does not create a new criminal offense nor expand existing penalties. Rather, it addresses and corrects a dangerous loophole in Rhode Island's current cyberstalking and cyberharassment statute—one that allows individuals with clearly malicious intent to evade accountability simply by claiming that harassment was not their sole purpose.

In practice, this loophole has real and frightening consequences. It enables individuals whose behavior escalates from online threats and intimidation into real-world danger to act with increasing boldness, knowing they are unlikely to face prosecution. This emboldenment is not hypothetical; I have witnessed it firsthand.

I am a friend of a North Kingstown School Committee member who endured hundreds upon hundreds of threatening, harassing, and slanderous communications. Many of these messages would have met the standard for cyberstalking or cyberharassment prosecution if she were a private citizen. Instead, because she was deemed a public official, the very protections designed to prevent such conduct were functionally out of reach.

In one particularly alarming incident, I was with her in the early morning hours during a walk in town when an individual who had repeatedly harassed her online slowed his car, shouted threats, drove past, circled back, and did it again. This conduct did not occur in a vacuum—it followed sustained harassment and threats, and it happened because the individual had no fear of consequence. Why would he? His prior actions had carried none.

There is no reason that any U.S. citizen—student, firefighter, school committee member, or state representative—should have no recourse when someone repeatedly messages wishes for their death, rape, torture, or harm to themselves or their families, including their children.

We ask our public officials to sacrifice so much in service to their communities. The safety of their families should never be part of that sacrifice.

House Bill H8058 takes a necessary and measured step toward accountability by ensuring that a documented pattern of harassment can be addressed as such, regardless of whether harassment is claimed to be the sole motive. I respectfully urge the Committee to support this bill and close a loophole that currently leaves too many people—especially those serving the public—unprotected.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Rogers

March 24, 2026