

PVD

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



Hon. Carol Hagan McEntee, Chair, House Committee on the Judiciary
et al. Sitting Committee Members, Rhode Island General Assembly

Amnesty International USA Local Group 1016

ITEM: H8272

POSITION: SUPPORT

To The Esteemed Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

Thank you for considering House Bill 8272, which seeks once again to create a legal prohibition against sexual relationships between peace officers in the State of Rhode Island and anyone in their custody. Laws that specifically criminalize such breaches of custodial trust are in effect in nearly every other state. We are an outlier for full protection, but it isn't too late.

This bill does the same as other General Law prohibiting sexual relations between an agent or officer of an institutional authority, and someone in their charge; such laws exist already for teachers, coaches, therapists and so on. Those laws recognize that sexual contact in such relationships could never be considered consensual due to power imbalances between parties and the presumed expectations of our justice institutions. This law would formally bar such contact between someone in custody, detention, or supervision and the professional peace officer. This law should ground and guide individual department policies. It includes an officer affirmative defense and addresses concurrent sentencing concerns to safeguard against abuse. The many stakeholders involved have had a robust conversation over the life of this legislation.

When this bill is passed, Rhode Island will become the 37th state to adopt the full version of this law, and the 48th state to criminalize. **We will not be the last state in the Union** to afford this increased measure of safety in our sexual assault laws. Thank you for standing up for Human Rights in RI.

Amnesty International PVD strongly urges the committee to consider this bill favorably and send it to the House floor recommending passage.