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To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: DARE Testimony in Strong Support of H 8272

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Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of House Bill 8272.

For over 40 years, DARE has organized low-income families in communities of color across Rhode Island to fight for social, political, and economic justice. Through our work, we hear directly from individuals impacted by the criminal legal system—many of whom have experienced or fear exploitation while in custody.

H 8272 is a critical step toward addressing that harm.

People who are detained, arrested, or otherwise in custody are in a uniquely vulnerable position. The power imbalance between law enforcement and individuals in custody is absolute. In these circumstances, consent cannot be freely given, and any sexual contact represents an abuse of authority.

We have heard stories—too often—of individuals who feel they have no voice, no protection, and no recourse when misconduct occurs. The absence of clear legal consequences only deepens that harm and allows abuse to continue unchecked.

By explicitly naming this conduct as a felony, H 8272 sends a strong and necessary message: abuse of power will not be tolerated, and those in custody deserve protection and dignity.

This legislation is about safeguarding human rights, strengthening accountability, and ensuring that systems of authority are not used to exploit those who are most vulnerable.

DARE urges the Committee to pass House Bill 8272.

Thank you for your consideration.

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