

Madam Chair and distinguished members of the House Judiciary Committee, good evening.

My name is Antone Souza, Jr. I am the Chief and Director of Public Safety at the Rhode Island School of Design. I am here today in my capacity as President of the Rhode Island College and University Public Safety Administrators Association, which is comprised of the Chiefs and Public Safety Directors from all eleven colleges and universities in our state.

I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 8293, which, if passed, would give Rhode Island's private college public safety officers and security officers the ability to temporarily detain individuals suspected of committing criminal offenses on our respective campuses while awaiting the arrival of local police.

As you may imagine, college public safety officers regularly encounter individuals suffering from mental health crises, disorderly persons, assault suspects, and individuals involved in vandalism and other criminal incidents. Many of these situations involve persons who may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or who are experiencing emotional or psychological distress.

When our officers determine that an individual should be criminally charged or an intervention for mental health or substance use concerns is required, we contact police and/or fire and EMS services. At that point, we are placed in the difficult position of having to temporarily manage or detain the individual while waiting for those services to arrive, which may also include community-based mental health clinicians. In some cases, these individuals may become violent or physically resist being detained.

Sometimes it may take police 10 to 15 minutes to arrive on scene. Although that may not sound like a long time, when an officer is trying to safely manage someone who is actively resisting or becoming violent, every minute can feel much longer.

In an effort to protect officers and their communities, some colleges allow their officers to carry and utilize handcuffs. However, other institutions choose not to because there is currently no clear statutory authority that specifically allows private college public safety or security officers to detain criminal offenders.

At RISD, I equip my officers and provide regular training in defensive tactics, handcuffing, use of force, and Mental Health First Aid. I believe it is in the best interest of overall campus safety to allow for this limited detention authority, and it

is also in the best interest of my officers so they can better protect themselves and others while waiting for police to arrive. We also maintain a very detailed Use of Force policy that clearly defines when and how force may be used.

Currently, the only authority that I—and other private colleges whose officers carry handcuffs—rely upon is Rhode Island General Law 12-7-16, which I understand originates from common law and allows any person to detain someone who has committed an offense. Admittedly, we may be walking a very thin line relying on this broad and somewhat vague authority.

Every day, hundreds of public safety officers patrol college campuses throughout our state, protecting thousands of students, faculty, staff, and visitors. These officers are sometimes placed in situations where they must intervene to stop criminal conduct, prevent escalation, and protect both themselves and others. We are simply asking for clearer and more specific legal authority for these officers to perform this important work safely and responsibly.

Madam Chair, I believe you also have a copy of a letter of support for this bill from Sidney Wordell, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association.

For the reasons I have outlined, I respectfully request passage of this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration.