

April 2, 2026

House Judiciary Committee

State of Rhode Island General Assembly

82 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Members of the Committee,

We appreciate the chance to submit this written testimony in support of Bill H7205, AN ACT RELATED TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE—SENTENCING RECONSIDERATION ACT. This proposed bill would allow individuals incarcerated for non-violent offenses to seek sentence reductions from Rhode Island’s superior court after serving 10 years.

This bill represents an important public health opportunity to reduce the long-term health impact of prison sentences on incarcerated individuals, particularly with regard to mental health. It has been well documented that incarceration negatively impacts mental health outcomes.<sup>1-5</sup> Many individuals experience chronic mental health disorders during their incarceration and after release<sup>1-3</sup>. Mood disorders such as Major Depressive Disorder and Bipolar Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and anxiety, along with general depressive symptoms leading to suicidal ideation are particularly linked to incarceration<sup>1-4</sup>. The impacts of these illnesses can last for years and limit an individual’s ability to function in daily life and reduce their ability to cope or engage with the environment outside of prison. A key factor in determining the intensity and lasting impact of these disorders is the length of time an individual spends incarcerated<sup>1,2</sup>. This is a particular concern for juvenile or young adult offenders, for whom the severity of mental health outcomes is correlated with the age of their first incarceration<sup>6</sup>.

Additionally, racial and ethnic disparities are important to consider. Black and Hispanic individuals are incarcerated at much higher rates than White individuals<sup>7</sup>, often much earlier in life than other incarcerated individuals. This results in higher rates of depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and other mental health disorders throughout life<sup>6</sup>. For these reasons, among many others, opportunities for sentence reconsideration are imperative to establish a justice system that results in equitable health outcomes for all.

Long-term imprisonment has a significant cost on individuals and the wider community, and the impact of mental health for incarcerated individuals should be central to this issue. We believe there is significant scientific evidence to question the utility of long-term prison sentences on the basis of their detrimental mental health impacts<sup>8</sup>. As a state, we should do our best to alleviate these impacts on our populous. This bill presents an avenue for that and represents an important step in the right direction. It has our full support. Thank you to the committee for your consideration in reviewing this testimony.

Sincerely,



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Rhode Island Public Health Institute

## References:

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