

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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April 2, 2026

TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill 8275

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINALS—STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- RESTRICTIVE CONFINEMENT OVERSIGHT ACT

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **strongly supports** the passage of H8275, which aims to establish the Restrictive Housing Oversight Committee for the purpose of monitoring the use of solitary confinement, also known as restrictive housing, at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC). Additionally, the bill seeks to ensure a minimum number of hours per day outside of a cell, with opportunities for meaningful social interaction, and creates reporting obligations for RIDOC regarding the use of restrictive housing. In addition, it creates an oversight committee of various stakeholders to ensure that the Act's dictates are being followed.¹

While RIDOC has taken steps to implement some recommendations from the Special Legislative Commission to Study and Assess the Use of Solitary Confinement at the Rhode Island ACI (Special Commission) from 2017,² we believe there is still much more to be done. The proposed bill aligns with some of the important recommendations in the Special Commission's report. Of these, the Office of the Public Defender is particularly supportive of the creation of a clear definition of "vulnerable population" and the requirement for inmates in disciplinary confinement to have a minimum number of hours outside of their cells. It is increasingly recognized that solitary confinement has detrimental effects on the mental and physical health of inmates, and it is disproportionately used on vulnerable populations. Further, evidence suggests that it is ineffective and inefficient as a means of prison discipline.³

¹ The OPD appreciates the inclusion of our office as a stakeholder.

² Report of the Special Legislative Commission to Study and Assess the Use of Solitary Confinement at the Rhode Island ACI (2017), *available at* <https://www.rilegislature.gov/Reports/Solitary%20final%20report.pdf> (last accessed April 2, 2026).

³ Garza, K. Solitary Confinement: Isolating the Neuroethical Dilemma, *Neuroonline Society for Neuroscience*, Sep. 18, 2018, *available at* <https://neuroonline.sfn.org/professional-development/solitary-confinement-isolating-the-neuroethical-dilemma> (last accessed April 2, 2026).

While H8275 does not eliminate the use of solitary confinement, it provides critical oversight and ensures that those in solitary confinement are denied neither meaningful social interaction outside their cells nor access to other basic necessities. The bill's reporting requirements and the creation of the oversight commission will enhance transparency, ensuring that the public and policymakers are informed about the use of restrictive housing. In addition, it calls for the appropriation of sums in order to fund the committee, which means it will not draw from DOC resources already allocated elsewhere.

Passing this legislation would demonstrate a commitment to a correctional system that prioritizes rehabilitation, accountability, and respect for the dignity of every person in its custody.

The Office of the Public Defender urges the Committee to vote in favor of passage.

Sincerely,

/s/ Angela M. Yingling

Angela M. Yingling

Legislative Liaison

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