

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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April 8, 2026

TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No. 8070

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES -- WEAPONS

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **supports the intent but has concerns about** House Bill No. 8070, a bill that would permit college and university students, employees, and professors to carry pepper spray and stun guns for self-defense. We do not object to the intent behind the bill, which is to allow people to possess non-lethal weapons for their own defense—in fact, we support it—but we have two concerns about the language and structure of this bill.

First, **all adult Rhode Islanders are already allowed to possess pepper spray for their own defense.** Section 11-47-57 explicitly permits a person to carry and use of “‘mace’ or similar substances,” *i.e.*, pepper spray, for their own protection; therefore, the inclusion of that clause in the bill is superfluous and may lead to confusion. If colleges and universities are not honoring this statute, we suggest that the amendments underlining the legality of these self-defense mechanisms be placed in § 11-47-57—with the term “pepper spray” added for clarity—to ensure there is no confusion.

Secondly, we agree that college and university members should be allowed to possess stun guns for their own defense, but we respectfully submit that this permission **be extended to all Rhode Island adults.** House Bill 8072, also on for hearing on April 8, 2026, would accomplish this goal, and we would encourage the Committee to pass that bill, which would provide protection to all Rhode Island adults.

Sincerely,

/s/ Angela M. Yingling

Angela M. Yingling

Legislative Liaison

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