

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

160 Pine Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

TELEPHONE: (401) 222-3492

FAX: (401) 222-3287

EMAIL TO: info@ripd.org

WEBSITE: www.ripd.org

April 8, 2026

TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No. 8057

**ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES—
COMMERCIAL SEXUAL ACTIVITY**

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **supports** House Bill 8057, which would repeal the sections of the General Laws which criminalize commercial sexual activity. This legislation recognizes the need to approach issues related to sex work with a more compassionate and nuanced perspective and would represent significant steps toward gender equity, criminal justice reform, and the fair treatment of individuals involved in the criminal legal system.

In addition, the proposed legislation corresponds with recommendations made in the August 14, 2023, Final Report of the Special Legislative Commission to Study Ensuring Racial Equity and Optimizing Health and Safety Laws Affecting Marginalized Individuals (“the Report”).¹ Specifically, H8057 corresponds with Recommendation 1 of the Report, which was to “[c]onsider a Rhode Island law to restore the pre-2009 landscape, such that private, consensual sexual activity remains out of the reach of criminal laws.”²

These bills embody a more humane approach to addressing the needs of the individuals to whom they apply. The proposed legislation aligns with a broader movement towards treating individuals involved in sex work with dignity and focusing on harm reduction and support rather than punitive measures.

In conclusion, the Office of the Public Defender urges the Committee to recommend H8057 for passage.

Sincerely,
/s/ Angela M. Yingling

¹ This Report is available at <https://rilegislature.gov/commissions/MIC/commdocs/05-22-2023---Final%20Report%20Marginalized%20Individuals%20Commission.pdf> (last accessed April 8, 2026).

² *Id.*

Angela M. Yingling
Legislative Liaison
Office of the Public Defender
401-222-1505
ayingling@ripd.org