

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No. 8079

**ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES—
COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEDURE—PROCEDURE GENERALLY—JURY LISTS**

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **supports** House Bill 8079, which would amend the jury list and jury qualification statutes by adding individuals receiving public assistance benefits to its ranks. As attorneys who practice in this state's courtrooms every day, we can attest that our jury pools are often bereft of people from many of our clients' racial, ethnic, and socio-economic or income backgrounds (especially in Providence County). In other words, the jury pools are often far less diverse than the defendants whose fates they are asked to decide. This is because the current places we cull the jury lists from—drivers license rolls, unemployment rolls, the state income tax rolls—disproportionately exclude both people of color and those from the lower income brackets.

The OPD supports any measure to increase the diversity of the jury pools so that they better reflect the wide cross-section of people who live in our state. Allowing the public benefit rolls to be used as a source of potential jurors would allow the service of many people who might never otherwise be selected. Jury service is an important civic duty, and it is essential that people from all walks of life are allowed to participate in it. After all, the fairest and most unbiased decisions are made when multiple viewpoints are considered—and increasing the number of people eligible for jury service would allow more viewpoints to be expressed in the jury room.

In conclusion, the Office of the Public Defender believes that including those receiving public assistance benefits in the jury pool would lead to more just results in the courtroom, and we therefore urge the Committee to recommend H8079 for passage.

Sincerely,

/s/ Angela M. Yingling

Angela M. Yingling

Legislative Liaison

Office of the Public Defender

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