



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

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April 9, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee
Chair, House Committee on Judiciary
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H8079 – An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – Procedure Generally –Jury Lists

Dear Chair McEntee:

I am writing in opposition to H8079, which requires the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide the jury commissioner with the names of individuals receiving public assistance benefits to expand the State's jury pool.

While DHS appreciates the goal of broadening jury participation, the bill raises significant legal concerns related to federal confidentiality requirements. In particular, federal regulations governing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) strictly limit the disclosure of recipient information to specific program-related purposes and do not authorize its use for jury administration. Because SNAP is federally funded, noncompliance could expose the State to sanctions or loss of administrative funding.

Rhode Island law defines "public assistance benefits" broadly to include multiple programs administered by DHS, including SNAP. To the extent the bill would require disclosure of SNAP recipient information, this would conflict with federal law. Other DHS programs may not be subject to the same restrictions, but the bill does not distinguish among them.

DHS notes that many individuals receiving public assistance are already captured through existing jury source lists (e.g., DMV and voter records), and others may not be eligible for jury service. As drafted, the bill may therefore have limited impact on expanding the jury pool while introducing legal and operational risks.

For these reasons, DHS respectfully opposes H8079 as drafted. If the Committee wishes to advance this policy, DHS recommends clarifying the bill to ensure compliance with federal law, including explicitly excluding any information subject to federal confidentiality restrictions.

I appreciate your consideration of the issues raised in this letter. If you have additional questions, please reach out to Deborah Barclay, DHS chief legal counsel, via email at deborah.barclay@ohhs.ri.gov. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kimberly Merolla-Brito
Director

RI Department of Human Services

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
The Honorable Brandon C. Potter
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel for the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy