



Rhode Island Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Weybosset Hill Station, P.O. Box 23101

TESTIMONY OF THE RHODE ISLAND ASSOCIATION OF CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYERS (RIACDL) **IN SUPPORT OF 2026—H 8079**

- The Rhode Island Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (RIACDL) writes to express its support for 2026—H 8079 which proposes an expansion of the jury list and jury qualification statutes to add individuals receiving public assistance benefits.
- Under the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution, a criminal defendant has a right to an impartial jury drawn from a fair cross-section of the community. This “fair cross-section” guarantee recognizes that all groups, members, and sections of our community are necessary to ensure a comprehensive perspective on each matter tried to a jury. It is critical to encourage any effort to improve diversity in the jury pools of this State.
- The statutory adjustment proposed in 2026—H 8079 is another step forward by our General Assembly to address the systemic issue of under-representation of racial and ethnic minorities in jury pools in this State and nationwide. This legislation continues and expands upon the prior legislative efforts to diversify the makeup of juries in all cases. Rhode Island originally used lists of registered voters as the sole source for compiling juror lists. Licensed motor vehicle operators and Rhode Island identification cards were added in 1995. P.L. 1995, ch. 71, § 1 (licensed motor vehicle operators and Rhode Island identification cards added). State income tax returns and those receiving unemployment compensation were added in 2003. P.L. 2003, ch. 430, § 1 (adding state income tax returns and those receiving unemployment compensation). This legislation is the next logical step in this process.
- As the United States Supreme Court recognized in 1975, representation in the judiciary process serves the important purposes of (1) guarding against the State’s exercise of arbitrary power, (2) preserving public confidence in the fairness of the criminal justice system, and (3) implementing the important value of sharing in the administration of justice as a phase of civic responsibility.
- RIACDL strongly supports the expansion of the potential jury pool to include individuals receiving public assistance benefits, and thanks the Committee for its consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully Submitted,

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RIACDL is an affiliate organization of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL). RIACDL was founded in 1988 by the late Richard M. Casparian, former Public Defender for the State of Rhode Island from 1988 until his death in 1997. RIACDL’s mission includes, “working toward achieving justice and dignity... for persons accused of crime and the criminal justice system, and to influence the criminal law for the betterment of the criminal justice system...” RIACDL is registered with the Rhode Island Secretary of State’s Office as a nonprofit organization.