



Mayor of Providence

Brett P. Smiley

April 9, 2026

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

Dear Chair McEntee and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I strongly support for House Bill 8328, *An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – Courts – Permitting Virtual or Remote Court Hearings*, and House Bill 8347, *An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government - Restrictions on State and Municipal Cooperation with Civil Immigration Enforcement*. These two bills would affirm Rhode Island's commitment to safeguarding the rights, safety, and dignity for all residents, regardless of immigration status, and enshrine much needed protections into state law.

In Providence, through the *Safe Providence for All* initiative, I have made clear that my Administration will operate in a way that protects the rights of all Providence residents, regardless of immigration status. We have trained staff across City departments and when we have heard concerns raised by our community, we have acted. Through executive orders, we have established policies for how City departments interact with federal immigration authorities. We have made clear that the Providence Police Department (PPD) does not proactively collaborate with federal immigration officials. The City has urged federal law enforcement to follow state law 42-161 requiring all front-line officers to wear body cameras while on duty, to follow PPD procedures for masking, and to clearly display identification. The City of Providence has also prohibited the use of City property for civil immigration enforcement activities. And we have backed our commitment to our residents with resources, including funding to create Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island's 24/7 legal immigration helpline, so families have access to information when they need it most.

We did all of this for a simple reason, when people are afraid to call the police, show up to court, send their kids to school, or seek medical care, the entire community is less safe. House bills 8328 and 8347 would codify statewide implementation of policies that Providence has already adopted.

House Bill 8328 ensures that our courts are not weaponized by permitting all Rhode Island courts to conduct hearings remotely. This is something we already do in Providence at the municipal court level and ensures that all residents can participate in judicial proceedings. House Bill 8347 prohibits state or local authorities from voluntary participation in federal civil immigration enforcement and does not prohibit compliance with a judicial warrant or court order. This has long been a policy in the City of Providence and is necessary to preserve trust in public institutions.

All of these bills are consistent with federal law and allow federal immigration authorities to carry out their lawful responsibilities. These bills, and Providence's policies, are grounded in practices that many communities across the country have already adopted.

In Providence, we have shown that we can uphold the law and protect the rights of our residents. These bills build on that work and would lead to much needed protections across Rhode Island.

I thank the sponsors for sponsoring these critical bills and respectfully urge the committee to vote in favor of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brett Smiley" with a vertical line to the right of the name.

Brett P. Smiley
Mayor