



The RI FREEDOM Collective

RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES - HOMICIDE

IN SUPPORT OF H 7132

Dear Chairperson McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Rhode Island stands at a pivotal moment – an opportunity to join the growing national movement to end the practice of sentencing children and emerging adults to die in prison.

In 2021, Rhode Island took a landmark step by enacting the Youthful Offenders Act which provides parole eligibility after 20 years for individuals convicted of offenses committed before age 22. This law is a testament to Rhode Island's recognition that young people possess a unique capacity for change. However, this law does not go far enough. Twenty-eight states plus Washington D.C. have now banned juvenile life without parole. Rhode Island must now take the next step and ban life without parole entirely for juveniles and emerging adults.

Eliminating LWOP does not mean automatic release. It means parole eligibility – a structured review process where individuals must affirmatively demonstrate rehabilitation, maturity, remorse, and educational achievement. Since 2016, over 1200 individuals previously sentenced to juvenile LWOP have been released nationwide, and recidivism data consistently shows that formerly incarcerated youth who mature and rehabilitate pose minimal public safety risk.

Rhode Island has already acknowledged through the Youthful Offenders Act that young people can change. The science confirms it and the national trend demands it. Now is the time to ensure that no child in Rhode Island is sentenced to die in prison without even demonstrating that change.

We respectfully urge this committee to advance this bill to the floor for a vote with an addendum allowing the law to be retroactive from 1993.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

The Rhode Island Freedom Collective

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