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April 28, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903
HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov

Support H. 8094 – child passenger safety

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association, I write in support of H. 8094, legislation relating to child passenger safety and unattended children in motor vehicles.

This bill provides an important and practical update to existing law by restoring appropriate discretion to law enforcement officers when responding to situations involving unattended children in vehicles. As written, the legislation allows officers to issue a verbal warning in appropriate circumstances, while preserving the ability to pursue criminal charges in cases where the facts warrant a more serious response.

From a public safety standpoint, this flexibility is critical. Leaving a child unattended in a vehicle can present serious and immediate risks, including extreme heat exposure, abduction, or other harm. At the same time, not all situations are identical, and law enforcement officers must be able to assess the totality of the circumstances and respond accordingly.

H. 8094 strikes the right balance by emphasizing education and awareness in less severe situations, while ensuring that dangerous or negligent behavior can still be addressed through existing criminal statutes. This approach supports both prevention and accountability.

Providing officers with discretion in these cases enhances their ability to protect children, engage with the public in a constructive way, and intervene appropriately before a situation escalates into tragedy.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to support H. 8094.

Sincerely,

Chief Sidney Wordell (ret.)
Executive Director
Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association