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TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No. 8100

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES -- ACCIDENTS AND ACCIDENT REPORTS

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **opposes** House Bill No. 8100, which seeks to enhance the penalties for motor vehicle offenses.

H8100 proposes increasing—in most cases doubling but in some cases *tripling*—the maximum sentences for driving to endanger, leaving the scene, and DUIs with serious bodily injury or death resulting. However, there is no data to suggest that higher prison sentences would deter people from driving dangerously or under the influence.¹ On the contrary, there has been research that indicates that raising the maximum imprisonment sentence has very little deterrent effect.²

In addition, our current maximum sentence for DUI/death resulting cases (fifteen years) places us among the average in terms of punishment; to raise it to thirty years would vault us into the top echelon of severity. It is noteworthy that twenty-seven states have penalties that are either equivalent or lower to Rhode Island's for these crimes, and only seven have penalties as high or higher than the proposed thirty years. See MADD Report, Penalties for Drunk Driving Vehicular Homicide, available at <https://madd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Vehicular-Homicide.pdf> (last accessed April 9, 2026).

We understand why dangerous driving is a serious concern, but submit that the current penalties are severe enough and put us in line with the majority of states in the country. We also encourage alternative strategies that prioritize education, prevention, detection, and rehabilitation over excessively punitive measures.

Sincerely,

¹ Alexander Wagenaar, *General deterrence effects of U.S. statutory DUI fine and jail penalties: long term follow-up in 32 states*, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH, (March 2007), available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17854574/> (last accessed April 9, 2026).

² *Id.*

/s/ Angela M. Yingling
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