

Call Off Your Old
Tired Ethics



COYOTE RI *Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics*

To: Honorable Members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees

From: Bella Vaughn, Executive Director, COYOTE RI

Date: March 10, 2026

Subject: TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF H7651 / S2161 (Bail on 32)

To the Members of the Committees,

COYOTE RI urges a **YES vote on H7651 and S2161**. My testimony is based on two years (2024–2025) of running a three-[phase reentry program at the ACI](#). This included:

1. **In-House:** A 12-week "Empowered Path" curriculum led by Lindsey Berry (Master of Social Work), where participants earned time off their sentences.
2. **Immediate Reentry:** We provided \$100 gift cards for food (Stop & Shop) and \$100 for clothing (Savers) to stabilize them in the first 30 days. Case management where we helped people navigate the "paperwork trap"—applying for SNAP, Medicaid, and getting the \$10 needed for a DMV ID.
3. **Ongoing Support:** Our "Sister for Sister" weekly support groups, which helped people—including those coming home from federal prisons—find actual services in a state where "resources" are often just names on a list with no available beds.

The "Catch and Release" Cycle of Poverty The core of this bill is the **10-day hold without bond**. In those 10 days, a person's life is destroyed. If they are pulled over for a technical violation they didn't even know existed, their car is towed, they miss picking up their children (leading to DCYF intervention), they lose their job, and they face eviction.

Even though the law says a hearing should happen in 10 days, our experience shows the majority of women are held for **90 days**, only to be taken to court and "magically" released on probation again with the same orders: "get mental health and substance abuse treatment." But there is no box for the judge to check for **poverty**. You cannot treat mental health or addiction while someone is fighting for survival on the street.

The Moral and Financial Cost While we fund the prison system, we are defunding the life-lines. This year, Rhode Island failed to fully fund RIPTA, cutting routes that people need to

get to work and probation meetings. We are "policing poverty" while people are literally dying in the streets. **Just last month, in February 2026, a homeless man and his mother froze to death in a car at the Miriam Hospital parking lot.** They were in a hospital lot, and they still died because there was nowhere for them to go.

The Math of Injustice: Based on RIDOC data, the average annual cost to incarcerate an individual is **\$154,810**.

- **90 days of incarceration costs \$38,702.** * That \$38,700 is enough to pay for an **entire year of a 2-3 bedroom apartment (\$28,800), plus food, utilities, and transportation.** We are spending \$38,000 to keep a person in a cage for shoplifting because they were hungry or trespassing because they were trying to find a safe place to sleep. Then we release them back to homelessness with no clean underwear, no ID, and no bus pass, and we expect a different result.

Rhode Island must be more responsible with how it spends taxpayer money. We are asking you to stop funding the cage and start funding the person. We cannot fix these issues until people are stabilized with housing and clothing first.

Respectfully,

Bella Robinson

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[COYOTE RI 2025 Annual Review Report](#)