



Representative Carol McEntee
House Judiciary Committee

April 2, 2026

Support for H7203, H7281, and H7651

Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee,

Rhode Island Working Families Power writes in strong support of **H7203, H7281, and H7651**. Working Families Power advocates for policies that promote justice and compassion for all residents, and these bills help achieve those goals.

Rep. Felix's bill, H7203 would further delineate the definition of a misdemeanor. This legislation would help ensure that Rhode Islanders have a chance to stay with their families and are not swept up in consequences more grave than their offenses demand just because of their financial circumstances. Studies show that there are more effective ways to ensure compliance with court orders than cash bail.

Rep. Cruz' bill, H-7281, which would add consideration of someone's status as a caregiver in sentencing decisions, is a hugely important step to help reduce family trauma, improve child development, and improve parenting relationships. Incarcerated Rhode Islanders have an average of two children per commitment, and it is Black, Hispanic, and Native American families that are disproportionately torn apart by incarceration.

Given that having an incarcerated parent is a significant factor that leads children to end up in foster care, adding parent and caregiver consideration would help promote alternatives and help keep families together. Studies have shown that both parents and children who go through family based substance treatment programs are also more likely to succeed than they are when parents are incarcerated.

Rep. Batista's bill, 7651, would allow Rhode Islanders charged with probation violations to be granted release on personal recognizance so they can contest the charges from their communities instead of from behind bars. Currently, 1 out of 20 Rhode Islanders is on probation – the 2nd highest rate in the country, and Rhode Island has the third highest length of probation sentences. Residents charged with probation violations can be held for up to two weeks, which often leads to their loss of jobs, housing, or custody of children. This bill would give thousands of

Rhode Islanders the chance to keep their lives in families intact.

Enacting these bills would help provide an opportunity for thousands of families in Rhode Island to stay together. We hope the committee and legislature will move forward with this legislation.

Thank you,

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler

Progressive Governance Director
Rhode Island Working Families Power