



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 8503, CREATING A HOUSE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY- BASED SOLUTIONS TO REDUCE INCARCERATION OF WOMEN May 14, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this resolution which would create a special legislative commission to study and provide recommendations related to supporting community-based solutions to reduce the incarceration of women in Rhode Island.

According to the 2024 annual RI Department of Corrections inmate population, over 42% of female commitments are incarcerated for non-violent offenses.¹ Many of them are incarcerated solely because they are unable to afford bail while awaiting trial, are detained due to technical probation violations, or lack access to meaningful diversion and treatment options. Because of this, studying alternatives to incarceration will help address the underlying causes of incarceration, which often functions as a response to poverty, addiction, or mental health challenges.

Incarceration can have devastating additional consequences not only for the women incarcerated, but also for their children and families. Beyond the prison walls, incarceration of an individual often impacts housing, employment, and family structures, and contributes to the likelihood of future system involvement. Because of these potential impacts, focusing on policies that prioritize long-term positive outcomes rather than incarceration is essential.

In 2023, the General Assembly appropriately recognized these concerns and convened a special legislative task force to reduce recidivism of females within the criminal justice population in Rhode Island. Passage of this resolution would build upon and continue that important work by allowing stakeholders a seat at the table to further examine innovative and evidence-based approaches to reducing incarceration in our state. Notably, this resolution encourages the commission to incorporate into their research the recent findings that GLP-1 medications can help reduce cravings associated with substance use disorders.

Following the General Assembly's criminal justice reinvestments of the last few years, an examination of initiatives which prioritize rehabilitative and restorative measures over incarceration for nonviolent offenses would be undeniably beneficial.

Thank you for considering our views.

¹ FY24 Annual Population Report, see page 13. <https://doc.ri.gov/node/681>