

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Resolution No. 8503

ENTITLED, A HOUSE RESOLUTION CREATING A HOUSE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS TO REDUCE THE INCARCERATION OF WOMEN

Chairwoman Hagan McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **supports** the passage of HR8503, which would create a special legislative commission to study and provide recommendations relating to supporting community-based solutions to reduce the incarceration of women in Rhode Island. As women make up a minority of the prison population (approximately 7% in Rhode Island), their specific needs, concerns, vulnerabilities, and strengths are often subsumed into the general study of our (overwhelmingly male) prison population.

Rhode Island has made significant strides in this area, but, as women involved in the criminal justice system frequently face complex challenges (including addiction, trauma, housing instability, and barriers to employment and family reunification), and are often crime victims themselves, this commission would be essential to ensuring that we are making the most effective use of the funds we have. This commission would be charged with taking a holistic assessment of the current programs in place, available interventions that have not yet been adopted, and the cutting-edge developments in areas such as GLP-1 therapies in order to determine the best next steps in our approach to this multi-faceted problem. Rhode Island has received federal support through the United States Department of Justice Second Chance Act to expand evidence-based reentry services for women and to rigorously evaluate the outcomes of those interventions, and this collaborative approach to this task would ensure the best outcomes. The OPD applauds the diverse makeup of this commission and appreciates that we would have a seat at this table.

Accordingly, the OPD **supports** the passage of HR8503, and looks forward to participating in this project if it is adopted by the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

/s/ Angela M. Yingling

Angela M. Yingling
Legislative Liaison

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