

March 9, 2021

Chair Robert Craven and Committee on Judiciary
Rhode Island House of Representatives
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support of H6049

Dear Chair Craven and Members of the Committee on the Judiciary:

I am writing to you in support of H6049, an Act that would codify what we know to be true—police have enormous power over our citizens, and they should never be allowed to use that power to traumatize those in custody or under investigation.

I am writing on behalf of LGBTQ Action RI, an advocacy organization dedicated to securing equality and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Rhode Islanders. We thank lead sponsor Representative Henries for recognizing the need to protect Rhode Islanders from sexual assault while in police custody.

As a social worker and therapist, I worked for decades with survivors of sexual assault. Their recovery from trauma is often long; the effects cannot be overstated. We must speak clearly that predatory behavior from those who are entrusted to enforce our laws and maintain our safety is unacceptable and must be stopped.

There is no consent to sexual acts with officers who have the power to deny one's basic liberty and survival. It is horrifying to know that this happens far too often for those who are marginalized, particularly those engaged in sex work, disproportionately those who are poor, of color, and LGBTQ. The Committee on the Judiciary can speak loudly that this practice is criminal and must be taken seriously.

LGBTQ Action RI urges this committee to protect the well-being of all Rhode Islanders, and help reduce their vulnerability when detained or investigated.

Sincerely,

Wendy Becker, MSW, PhD
LGBTQ Action RI