



RHODE ISLAND BROTHERHOOD OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

"Representing Those Who Work the Toughest Beat in the State"

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Members of the House Labor Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
State House
Providence, Rhode Island

Honorable Chair and Members of the House Labor Committee,

I am writing to urge the House Labor Committee to advance and support H 7039, legislation that establishes enforceable limits on mandatory overtime for correctional officers at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections.

This bill addresses a long-standing labor issue: the routine use of forced overtime as a substitute for adequate staffing. Correctional officers are being frozen in not because of unforeseeable emergencies, but because of chronic and predictable staffing shortages in one of the most demanding and increasingly dangerous public-sector jobs in the state.

Mandatory overtime is occurring regularly across shifts and facilities, with officers experiencing repeated forced extensions of their scheduled workdays each year. While the frequency may vary depending on shift size or assignment, the impact on individual officers is consistent and comparable system-wide. Forced overtime has become normalized as a staffing practice rather than reserved for true emergencies.

H 7039 does not eliminate overtime, nor does it interfere with voluntary overtime. What it does is restore a basic labor standard: mandatory overtime must be a last resort, not a routine staffing tool. The bill requires the Department to exhaust reasonable efforts, seeking volunteers and contacting available qualified staff, before compelling overtime, and it protects employees from retaliation when they decline forced overtime outside of legitimate emergencies.

The General Assembly has already recognized this principle in the healthcare setting, enacting legislation to curb excessive mandatory overtime for nurses due to the risks associated with fatigue. The same principle applies here. Correctional officers are responsible for the custody, care, and control of incarcerated individuals in unpredictable and often volatile environments. Fatigue in this setting directly increases the risk of assaults, errors in judgment, and serious safety failures.

From a labor perspective, recruitment and retention remain central concerns. Corrections is not a popular job. It requires nights, weekends, holidays, and exposure to escalating violence. Rhode Island also remains less competitive than surrounding jurisdictions in compensation progression.

Massachusetts correctional officers reach top step in six years, Connecticut in ten, and most police departments in two to five years. Rhode Island officers currently wait ten years, moving to eight years in July, still lagging comparable agencies and contributing to staffing shortages and burnout.

H 7039 promotes responsible staffing, accountability, and workforce stability without undermining collective bargaining rights or emergency response authority. It reinforces a fundamental labor principle: staffing shortages should not be solved on the back of exhausted workers.

Correctional officers are asking for reasonable limits, basic protections, and recognition that chronic forced overtime is unsafe and unsustainable. This bill aligns squarely with the House Labor Committee's responsibility to protect workers, uphold fair labor practices, and promote public safety.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support H 7039 and move it forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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