

Testimony in Opposition to H 8296--An Act Relating to Criminal Procedure--Railroad, Steam Boat, and Bridge Police

Position: Oppose

Common Cause Rhode Island opposes H 8296 that would exempt from public disclosure any police report and related communication involving a railroad fatality.

Police reports are one of the most important types of public records. That is why they are among the first types of records mentioned in the Access to Public Records Act. Police reports are vital to making sure law enforcement is acting in an accountable manner.

Not only does this legislation shield important records from public view, it expressly allows police departments to share those same records with railroads which in some cases are private entities.

Common Cause understands that the purpose of this legislation is to shield railroad employees who are involved in a fatality from possible harassment. We are sympathetic to this purpose, but we believe that in the name of preventing harassment this legislation would create a black box around any railroad fatality that would harm the public interest in knowing what happened when there was a railroad fatality.