
Testimony in Support of S2161

From Tiia Mckinney <mckinneytiia@gmail.com>

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To Senate Judiciary Committee <SenateJudiciary@rilegislature.onmicrosoft.com>

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Dear Chairperson Senator LaMountain and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Tiia McKinney, and I am a resident of Cranston, Rhode Island. I am writing to express my strong support for S2161. As a member of Direct Action for Rights and Equality, I have met many people affected by the prison system, and S2161 would create a more balanced and transparent process for individuals accused of probation violations.

The bill requires courts to presume release for most probation violations, set reasonable bail or non-monetary conditions, limit detention to cases involving genuine risk or danger, require prompt hearings, and mandate written reasons when someone is detained. As someone who also has experience within a District Attorney's office, these proposed probation violation procedural requirements will ensure fair treatment for alleged violators, and also appropriate use of jail resources and space.

Rhode Island currently has one of the harshest probation systems in the country. Individuals accused of probation violations can be incarcerated without bail while waiting for a hearing, often for weeks. During this time, many people lose their jobs, housing, and stability, even when the alleged violation would not normally result in jail time.

This system also contributes significantly to incarceration in Rhode Island. According to the Council of State Governments, while Rhode Island has the lowest incarceration rates in the United States, it has one of the highest probation rates in the nation. This study shows that approximately 60% of the sentenced admissions in Rhode Island jails were for probation violations. We know that probation is meant to reduce jail crowding, and to allow for a community-based jail alternative. The current jailing of alleged probation violators is not a fair or sensible use of the state's resources nor is it an effective means for rehabilitation.

When people on probation are being surveilled this closely for any minor misstep, they are not given a chance to fully change. Reforms like S2161 help ensure that detention is reserved for cases where it is truly necessary, benefiting the court in resource expenditure, and benefiting citizens who will finally have a second chance. Probation is meant to be an alternative sentence, we cannot allow it to continue being a revolving door to prison in Rhode Island.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support and pass S2161.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Tiia McKinney
Cranston, Rhode Island