

PVD

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



Hon. Matthew Lamountain, Chairperson, Senate Committee on Judiciary,
et al. sitting Judiciary Committee Members, Rhode Island General Assembly

Amnesty International USA Local Group 1016
ITEM: S2161, S2162, S2290, S2299, S2313, S2964, S2983
POSITION: SUPPORT

To The Esteemed Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

Thank you for considering these Senate Bills, which together seek to create a more restorative environment in our State for those among us who have “paid their debt to society.” It is Amnesty 1016’s position that there can be a balance between protecting society from recidivists vis-a-vis respecting ex-offenders from a cruel burden of stigma.

Notably, removing so-called “32F Violations” from our criminal procedures constitutes the single best way in Rhode Island to minimize barriers to basic human rights (housing, livelihood, education, etc.) for the formerly incarcerated, lowering incarceration rates in our prisons, and ultimately increasing social welfare measures in communities where mothers and fathers can stay in their jobs and families despite a traffic stop or similar interaction with the criminal justice system.

All seven pieces of legislation would be a solid step in the direction away from a carceral system based on racist concepts of the inherent criminality of the working classes, and towards a system that prioritizes the power of individuals and their communities to become whole again.

As has been mentioned by many observers, criminal sentences that have been served and put in an individual’s past ought not restrict their present or future opportunities, welfare, or liberty. They may have done a crime, but they have also, by definition of being back in society, done their time. Misdemeanors or nonviolent felony offenses for some have been an opportunity for reflection, growth, and a new approach to participating in society. They should have a clear

expectation of continued benefits that come with good time outside. A few of these bills are a matter of access to an important feature of our criminal justice system—expungement filings—but together they are also a mechanism to further incentivize positive behaviors and restoring oneself in the fabric of one’s communities and society at large. Any misgivings about what these bills seek to affect indicate a gross misunderstanding of our criminal justice system and specifically the ways that retribution and rehabilitation are intended to work for the individual and society.

Amnesty International USA PVD urges the Committee to consider these bills favorably and immediately send them to the Senate floor recommending passage