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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL S 2940**  
**Senate Judiciary Committee | March 10, 2026**  
**Submitted by: Rose Albert, Executive Director, Rhode Island for Community & Justice**

Greetings Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Rose Albert, and I am the Executive Director of Rhode Island for Community & Justice (RICJ), a nonprofit organization with a mission to reduce bias, bigotry, and racism and promote understanding and mutual respect among all races, religions, and cultures through advocacy, conflict resolution, and education. For over 74 years, RICJ has worked to make Rhode Island a more inclusive and just place, and at the center of that work has been our support for Juvenile Hearing Boards (JHBs) statewide. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of Bill S 2940.

RICJ supports JHBs across Rhode Island, working directly with boards in communities from Central Falls to Westerly, Providence to Hopkinton. We provide case management support, coordinate statewide data collection, facilitate chair meetings, and serve as the connective tissue that holds this network of community-based youth diversion boards together.

We serve youth ages 14–24, the majority of whom are first-generation immigrants, from lower-income households, and from communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the juvenile justice system. JHBs offer these young people something the formal court system often cannot: a second chance, accountability within their own community, and a path forward without a court record. The numbers speak for themselves. In 2024, 254 youth participated in JHBs statewide. Our 3-year re-arrest rate is just 10–12%, a powerful indicator that this model works.

**Why We Support Bill S 2940**

This bill addresses two critical gaps that RICJ has witnessed firsthand in our work across the state.

*1. Re-establishing a Statewide JHB Coordinator through Family Court*

JHBs are community-driven, but they cannot operate in isolation. Without a dedicated statewide coordinator, boards across Rhode Island lack consistent guidance, administrative support, and connection to resources. A statewide coordinator housed within Family Court would provide the infrastructure that boards need to operate effectively and consistently.



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We have seen what this looks like when it works. In Providence, a JHB Coordinator has played an essential role in linking youth to services, managing case files, and reporting outcomes. The statewide coordinator will work with the JHB Coordinator, providing technical assistance and increasing the impact of this work. Every board in Rhode Island deserves that level of support. Bill S 2940 makes that possible.

## *2. Automating Referral to JHBs for First-Time Misdemeanors*

Currently, referral to a JHB is entirely at the discretion of individual police officers. This creates inconsistency, and youth in one city are diverted to a JHB while youth charged with the same offense in another city go straight to Family Court. That is not equity. That is not justice.

Bill S 2940 would require that youth charged with a first-time misdemeanor be automatically referred to a JHB in cities and towns with one. Participation remains voluntary where youth and their families retain the right to decline but this bill ensures that every eligible young person is at least given the opportunity to be heard by their community rather than processed through the court system. This level of diversion will allow young people to remain in the community.

## **A Call to Action**

Rhode Island's JHBs are a model that other states look to and study. They are powered by dedicated community volunteers, supported by local law enforcement, and sustained by organizations like RICJ. But the system needs the state's support to grow and to work equitably for every young person in Rhode Island.

Bill S 2940 is a meaningful, targeted investment in our youth and in our communities. I urge this committee to support its passage.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

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