



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
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Peter F. Neronha
Attorney General

March 21, 2024

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chairman
House Committee on Judiciary
State House, House Lounge
Providence, RI 02903

Re: HB 7972: False Reporting

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I write today in support of HB 7972, legislation that would expand the crime of false reporting to include shootings or other dangerous events. I am grateful to Representative Kathleen Fogarty for her continued advocacy on this important issue impacting not only law enforcement, but our communities at large.

The phenomenon commonly known as “swatting” occurs when a false report of an ongoing emergency or threat of violence is made to law enforcement with the intention of prompting the mobilization of significant law enforcement resources. These “swatting” calls are becoming more and more prevalent around the country, and unfortunately, Rhode Island is no exception.

The current statute applies only to threats of explosives or dangerous substances or contrivance. As a result, we are unable to prosecute individuals who falsely report a shooting or any other type of dangerous event, so there is no recourse for these types of threats.

Too often my Office receives calls from police departments who are dealing with incidents that involve reports of individuals threatening gun violence. Just last year, our police departments received false threats of gun violence in multiple schools, in our cities, and even at our airport. These false reports lead to substantial mobilization of law enforcement. This is not only wasteful, but potentially dangerous as it creates unnecessarily risky situations at some locations and draws valuable police resources away from other legitimate emergencies. Additionally, emergency lockdowns or evacuations as a response to these false reports cause fear, panic, and other potential risks for innocent victims attending church, school, or other public places that are impacted.

As the State’s top law enforcement official, I am dedicated to ensuring the safety of Rhode Islanders, and supporting our law enforcement officers who do the same. This legislation would give our Office the tools it needs to hold individuals making these false threats

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accountable and would provide the people of Rhode Island with further assurances that these false reports are not taken lightly.

As always, I appreciate the Committee's consideration and am available for any further questions the Committee may have.

Sincerely,



Peter F. Neronha
Attorney General