

# OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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March 25, 2025

## TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

**House Bill No. 6026**

**ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO FOOD AND DRUGS – UNIFORM CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES ACT.**

Chairman Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender supports HB6026, which would reclassify the simple possession of 28 grams or less of certain controlled substances as a misdemeanor. The proposed legislation is another important step forward in addressing the problem of addiction, while avoiding the many collateral and unintended consequences that accompany felony convictions, such as the inability to obtain housing, employment, and necessary treatment.

HB6026 embraces the proven effectiveness of “the Public Health Model” and its emphasis on treatment and rehabilitation and moves further away from the punitive and failed “Criminal Model.” By prioritizing rehabilitation, the legislation also enhances public safety by reallocating scarce resources from less serious offenses to the successful investigation and prosecution of more serious crimes.

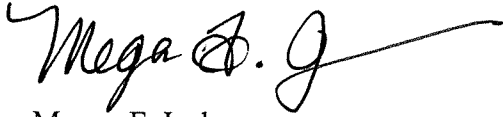
Research has consistently shown that more punitive measures, such as felony convictions for drug possession, are ineffective in deterring drug use. Yet, in 2016 alone, almost 280,000 people were incarcerated for drug offenses in state and federal prisons.<sup>1</sup> This proposed legislation would remove a significant barrier to the ability of drug-addicted individuals to turn their lives around, accelerating their path to recovery.

Our office urges the Committee to consider the positive impacts this legislation would have on the lives of Rhode Islanders suffering from addiction and to pass this forward-thinking legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Elderbroom, Brian and Durnan, Julia. “Reclassified: State Drug Law Reforms to Reduce Felony Convictions and Increase Second Chances.” p.2, *The Urban Institute*. (October 2018), available at: [Reclassified: State Drug Law Reforms to Reduce Felony Convictions and Increase Second Chances](#) (last accessed 3/24/25).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan F. Jackson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.

Megan F. Jackson  
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