

Good evening. Thank you to the chair and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Alexandra Gonzalez, and I am a lifelong resident of Rhode Island. I am here to express my support for Bill 5178, which holds personal significance for me.

Over a decade ago, my life was in turmoil. I grew up in an environment where drugs were a normal part of life. In an attempt to escape, I married before turning 18. Unfortunately, my life spiraled out of control, leading to homelessness and a struggle with addiction. During that difficult time, I was charged with drug-related crimes, which I deeply regret today.

Some of you may be familiar with part of my story, but you may not know the whole picture, and I won't go into detail here. However, I want to emphasize that over the past decade, I have worked hard to get my life back on track. I have maintained steady employment and founded a small nonprofit organization that has helped over 100 people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, I have dedicated countless hours to help others achieve their goals. Currently, I am enrolled in a four-year bachelor's program while raising my youngest son, who has autism, on my own. My persistent concern is how my past continues to hinder my progress in life.

If this committee and the other legislators seriously consider passing this bill, I would be one of many individuals who would benefit from your compassion. However, society as a whole would also gain. Imagine this: the more I succeed, the more the state benefits. I have seen previously incarcerated individuals whose tax contributions exceed those of many others, leading to an increase in state and local tax revenue. Additionally, as more people in my situation succeed, fewer will rely on state support in any form.

But it's not just about financial gains; it's about the pride and sense of accomplishment that comes from overcoming past mistakes. It's about feeling forgiven and shedding the stigma associated with my past. It's challenging enough to bear the weight of my experiences without the added burden of my criminal record. I aspire to a point where I am no longer my own worst critic. The passage of this bill would bring me one step closer to that goal.

I implore you to consider this measure and help individuals like myself, who have turned away from a criminal lifestyle and are striving to be productive citizens and neighbors.

I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you for your time.