



April 1, 2025

Dear Chairman and Committee Members,

My name is Juan Pablo Ocampo and I'm the Coordinator for the Immigrant Coalition of Rhode Island. On behalf of the Immigrant Coalition and our 38 member organizations, I ask this Committee to support House Bill 5502 that would change the maximum prison sentence for a misdemeanor offense from 365 to 364 days.

Under federal law, convictions that may be punishable by a year or more in prison can lead to detention, denial of necessary forms of immigration relief, and deportation for immigrants. Because all misdemeanors in Rhode Island carry a potential sentence of up to one year, this unintended one-day overlap in these statutes means that even first-time misdemeanors for which a person received no jail sentence at all can trigger deportation. By making a one-day change in the definition of "misdemeanor," this bill would protect hundreds of Rhode Islanders from cruel immigration consequences.

We need to address the current bias that treats an immigrant so differently from a citizen. Is it fair for immigrants to face significantly harsher penalties than a citizen for the same misdemeanor? Is it fair for an asylum seeker or a victim of domestic violence to be barred from immigration relief due to a misdemeanor? Of course not. And this bill takes a significant step toward mitigating that unfairness.

The Coalition understands passing this bill will have no unintended negative consequences. Due to federal law, a conviction for controlled substance, firearm offenses, child abuse, or domestic violence, would still trigger grounds for removal.

States like New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and New Mexico have already defined a misdemeanor to carry a maximum sentence of less than one year. This bill has already been passed in our Senate this year, and we need your support so the same can happen in the House. We urge this Committee to stand with us on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Juan Pablo Ocampo Sheen, Coordinator  
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## **THE IMMIGRANT COALITION OF RHODE ISLAND MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS**

American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island (ACLU RI)  
AMOR: Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance  
Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE)  
Center for Justice RI  
Coalition for a Multilingual RI (CMRI)  
Coalition of Advocates for Student Opportunities (CASO)  
Conexión Latina Newport  
Connecting for Children and Families  
DARE: Direct Action For Rights And Equality  
Diocese of Providence  
Dorcas International Institute  
Economic Progress Institute  
Elmwood Avenue Church of God Refugee Relief  
First Unitarian Church of Providence Sanctuary Group  
Fuerza Laboral  
International House of Rhode Island  
KIDS COUNT RI  
Latino Policy Institute  
New Bridges for Haitian Success  
Olneyville Neighborhood Association (ONA)  
Olneyville Resilience Hub  
Oasis International  
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England  
Progreso Latino  
Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)  
Refugee Dream Center  
Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV)  
RI Coalition for Children and Families  
RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty  
RI State Council of Churches  
RWU Immigration Law Clinic  
RWU Pro Bono Collaborative  
Sisters of Mercy  
Sojourner House  
Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice  
The Jewish Alliance of Greater RI  
The Liberian Community Association  
Truth in Immigration Project