



Testimony in Support
An Act Relating To Criminal Offenses -- General Provisions
April 1, 2025

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of the Latino Policy Institute, we submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 5502, which would adjust the definition of a misdemeanor by reducing the maximum sentence from 365 days to 364 days. This small but critical change will help prevent Rhode Islanders from facing devastating immigration consequences for minor offenses.

Under federal immigration law, certain misdemeanor convictions carrying a sentence of one year or more can lead to detention, denial of immigration relief, or even deportation. This means that a one-day difference in sentencing can be the deciding factor in whether a long-time Rhode Islander is able to stay with their family and community or faces permanent separation.

This bill does not take away judicial discretion—judges will still have the ability to impose sentences up to 364 days. What it does is bring Rhode Island in line with other states, such as New York, Washington, and Nevada, that have made similar changes to protect their immigrant communities. It ensures that our state's laws do not unintentionally subject people to extreme federal immigration penalties for minor offenses.

Rhode Island has an opportunity to stand in support of fairness, due process, and the well-being of our immigrant community members. We urge the House Judiciary Committee to approve this critical legislation and protect our state's immigrant residents from disproportionate immigration penalties that undermine family stability and community well-being.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Marcela Betancur
Executive Director
Latino Policy Institute