



April 1, 2025
House Judiciary Committee

To the Judiciary Committee:

We write to express the support of the Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition for House Bill 5502 that would change the maximum prison sentence for a misdemeanor offense from one year to 364 days.

Under immigration law, certain minor convictions that are punishable by a year or more in prison may lead to detention, denial of necessary forms of immigration relief, and deportation for immigrants. By making a one-day change in the definition of “misdemeanor,” this bill would protect hundreds of Rhode Islanders from these unnecessary, harsh immigration consequences.

It is important to note that, under this bill, judges will still have the discretion to impose prison sentences up to 364 days instead of 365. Passing this legislation would help protect vulnerable members of our immigrant community, including asylum seekers and victims of domestic violence, who otherwise could be barred from immigration relief due to a misdemeanor conviction. States like New York, Washington, and Nevada have amended their criminal codes in recent years in this way to protect their residents against harsh immigration consequences. We urge the Committee to approve this legislation and protect the state’s immigrant community from the harsh consequences of federal law for instances of minor misconduct.

Welcoming the stranger is a core part of our diverse faith traditions. The Interfaith Coalition is abundantly aware of the many struggles faced by immigrants today as we reflect upon our own journeys to the United States. We affirm our commitment to create the same opportunities for today's immigrants that were so valuable to our own families and communities in recent years and in decades past. We take seriously our mandate to care for the vulnerable as a matter of faith and thus support HB 5502.

Sincerely,

The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition