

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



Department of Corrections

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The Honorable Robert E. Craven Sr.
House Committee on Judiciary
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

April 3, 2025

Re: H5349 – Relating to Health and Safety -- Vital Records

Dear Chairperson Craven:

This evening the House Committee on Judiciary will consider House Bill# 5349, which will create an exemption for incarcerated persons who need a certified copy of their birth certificate prior to release. The Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) strongly supports this legislation as it removes a significant barrier to community reentry for those who are concluding their period of incarceration.

RIDOC remains committed to reducing Rhode Island's recidivism rate and taking proactive steps to ensure obstacles to reentry to the community upon the conclusion of one's time in prison are mitigated as much as possible or completely eliminated. This legislative proposal addresses a longstanding concern among the currently incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and various advocacy groups who have asked that the state prioritize that those reentering the community have the appropriate records and documents needed to attain employment, register for benefits, rent a home and for a variety of other relevant scenarios.

Many other states and even the Federal government have enacted similar measures for their incarcerated populations. This bill will bring Rhode Island in line with the proactive steps such states and prison agencies have taken to ensure those leaving their custody depart with needed documentation and records. In 2024, nearly 300 applications for birth certificates, along with instructions and assistance applying, were provided to individuals who were incarcerated. At this volume and at a rate of \$25 per applicant, the Department estimates it would cost the State approximately \$7,300 annually to provide such records free of charge. To ensure such a privilege is not exploited, this legislation is drafted to allow for an exception only for one's first request.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

Wayne T. Salisbury Jr.
Director

cc: Honorable members of the House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Representative Brandon Potter
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House