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April 3, 2025

TESTIMONY OF THE RHODE ISLAND PUBLIC DEFENDER REGARDING:

House Bill No. 5927

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- RESTRICTIVE CONFINEMENT OVERSIGHT ACT

Chairman Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender supports HB5927, which aims to establish the Restrictive Housing Oversight Committee for the purpose of monitoring the use of solitary confinement, also known as restrictive housing, at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC). Additionally, the bill seeks to ensure a minimum number of hours per day outside of a cell, with opportunities for meaningful social interaction, and reporting obligations for RIDOC regarding the use of restrictive housing.

While RIDOC has taken steps to implement some recommendations from the Special Legislative Commission to Study and Assess the Use of Solitary Confinement at the Rhode Island ACI (Special Commission), we believe there is still much more to be done.

The proposed bill aligns with some of the important recommendations in the Special Commission's report. Of these, the Office of the Public Defender is particularly supportive of the creation of a clear definition of "vulnerable population" and the requirement for inmates in disciplinary confinement to have a minimum number of hours outside of their cells.¹ It is increasingly recognized that solitary confinement has detrimental effects on the mental and physical health of inmates, and it is disproportionately used on vulnerable populations. Further, evidence suggests that it is ineffective and inefficient as a means of prison discipline.²

While HB5927 does not eliminate the use of solitary confinement, it provides critical oversight and ensure that those in solitary confinement are denied neither meaningful social

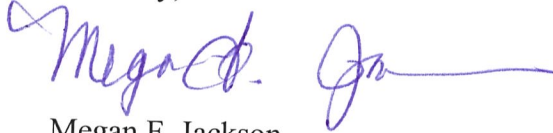
¹ We would note that the two-hour minimum outlined in the proposed bill for inmates in disciplinary confinement amounts to fewer hours than the twenty recommended in the Special Commission's Report. Available at: <https://www.rilegislature.gov/Reports/Solitary%20final%20report.pdf>, (last accessed 4/2/25).

² Garza, K. *Solitary Confinement: Isolating the Neuroethical Dilemma*, Society for Neuroscience, Sep. 18, 2018, available at: <https://neuronline.sfn.org/professional-development/solitary-confinement-isolating-the-neuroethical-dilemma>, (last accessed 4/2/25).

interaction outside their cells nor access to other basic necessities. The bill's reporting requirements will enhance transparency, ensuring that the public and policymakers are informed about the use of restrictive housing.

Passing this legislation would demonstrate a commitment to a correctional system that prioritizes rehabilitation, accountability, and respect for the dignity of every person in its custody. The Office of the Public Defender urges the Committee to vote in favor of passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Megan F. Jackson", followed by a horizontal line.

Megan F. Jackson
Legislative Liaison
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