

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: H5928 – Relating to State Affairs and Government - The Body Cameras for Correctional Facilities Act - The Willie Washington, Jr. Act

Dear Chairperson Craven:

This evening the House Judiciary Committee will consider House Bill #5928. This bill would mandate all Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) staff with direct supervision roles to wear body cameras while on duty in their assigned facility and establish an independent board to oversee the review of recorded incidents involving incarcerated individuals. While RIDOC is exploring the future implementation of body cameras for correctional officers, this legislation extends far beyond that by including other staff members with roles that come with an expectation of privacy and creates an unnecessary administrative board to serve a function which is already performed by the Department in consultation with other law enforcement agencies. For these reasons, RIDOC must oppose this legislation.

This legislation mandates that staff assigned to direct supervision roles shall wear body cameras while on duty within the facilities. Staff is defined as "employees or contractors of the Department of Corrections, including correctional officers, supervisors, and administrators." RIDOC interprets this legislation to mandate positions such as clinical social workers, adult counselors, other healthcare services personnel and contractors who provide programming to wear body cameras. This is problematic as there is often an expected level of privacy during an incarcerated person's interaction with such positions to ensure an honest dialogue as part of their medical care or more generally, the rehabilitation process.

The creation of an independent oversight board is unnecessary as there are several existing methods by which body camera footage may be requested, viewed and analyzed to include independent review by RIDOC's internal affairs unit, a review by the Attorney General's Office, and the ability of interested members of the public to submit an Access to Public Records Act (APRA) request. It is inequitable to develop criteria that is different for correctional officers when compared to statutes written for other law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, the composition of the proposed board is overly broad and does not layout the qualifications by which someone would be considered beyond identifying as someone in the outlined general categories.

The Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) contributes to public safety by maintaining a balanced correctional system of institutional and community programs that provide a range of custodial options, supervision and rehabilitative services in order to facilitate successful offender reentry into the community upon release.

RIDOC is exploring the implementation of body cameras for correctional officers and has engaged the Rhode Island Brotherhood of Corrections (RIBCO) on this very topic. While it is true that surveillance cameras are prevalent throughout the Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI), body cameras serve as an additional level of oversight and protection for staff and the incarcerated population, giving a transparent view of incidents that may occur. Of course, funding will be needed to institute any such initiative in the Department.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Wayne T. Salisbury Jr.".

Wayne T. Salisbury Jr.
Director

cc: Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Representative Morales, Hull, Alzate, Stewart, and Potter
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House