

House Committee on Judiciary  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02903  
House Lounge

April 10th, 2025

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill 5724

Dear Chairperson Robert E. Craven, Sr., and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Madison Burtan, and I am representing myself. During the day, I work at elementary schools in Providence. Last year, I was a substitute teacher in Central Falls.

I support House Bill 5724, which “Prohibits state or municipality from contracts to detain individuals for civil immigration violations, and if such a contract exists, it must end by July 1, 2026, and prohibits using public resources to detain those individuals.”

I support Bill HB-5724 because

- Detention Watch Network states, “The United States government maintains the world’s largest immigration detention system. Immigration detention is the unjust, inhumane, and unnecessary practice of incarcerating immigrants while they await a determination of their immigration status or potential deportation. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, the United States government detained over 273,000 people in a sprawling system of approximately 200 detention centers, jails, and prisons across the country run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).” ICE has a horrific record of abuse. In these detention centers, “people are deprived of their liberty, denied access to lawyers, separated from their families and loved ones, and subjected to severe medical neglect.” For myself and my community, this is unacceptable. ICE is actively terrorizing communities in Rhode Island, and our government is allowing them to do this. Not only are they allowing them to do this, but they are also relying on this detention center to make a profit. A quick aside: The Wyatt has been and continues to be a financial burden to the City of Central Falls, so this reliance on making a profit is done in vain. Other states in our country have passed laws prohibiting local governments from utilizing their jails as ICE detention facilities, and I believe Rhode Island needs to follow in their footsteps.

- On a personal note, my friends/colleagues and I have seen firsthand the damage ICE has done to many families in Rhode Island. My friend is a counselor at a middle school, being paid very little for the enormous job of trying to help students with massive amounts of trauma due to ICE’s involvement in the community. How can students be expected to come and learn at school when they have the constant threat of getting separated from their families? I can remember the first time I saw the Wyatt Detention Center. I was subbing for a kindergarten class on field day. I vividly remember going to a big field for field day. It was an exciting day for all the students because they spent the afternoon playing fun games outside. It was a beautiful sunny day.

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However, something changed when I saw this massive building across the street. I was not super familiar with Central Falls at the time and asked around about this building. The answers I got from the other teachers were: *It's a detention center. It's hard for some of the students to be out here on field day because they have family members who are in there.* I was devastated and horrified. I cannot imagine how the students felt. This is not a normal thing for anyone to experience, and if this becomes normal, our government has failed us. This detention center is in direct conflict with our expansive immigrant population, whom I, and many other educators, work with every day. We love working with these students and families, so we must stand up against this.

· You will hear from volunteers and organizers from AMOR (Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance). Everyone in this state should be listening to them. I read through a recent report they published containing letters from 13 concerned detainees, as well as correspondence with more than 40 others. AMOR is giving voice to the often voiceless detainees. I read these letters as a concerned citizen. Within the reports, there are eyewitness testimonies about the following topics: Medical Neglect, Imprisonment for Profit, Testimonies of Hunger, Racism, and Arbitrary Punishment. I urge every committee member to read through this report and the letters. Frankly, I'm embarrassed and ashamed to be living in a state where people in our community are subject to these types of abuse and neglect. I feel compelled to talk about how people in our community are not being treated with basic human dignity. This is unacceptable, and everyone should be concerned about this. I'm so thankful for the work AMOR does for this state and their continual work to get these people access to basic needs. Basic needs like phone calls and snacks should not cost money. People should not be going hungry because the kitchen didn't make enough food for everyone. Medical conditions being ignored is a violation of human rights and the Hippocratic Oath. These people should not be "**treated like animals,**" and we cannot continue to stand idly by while this happens.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB-5724.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak in favor of HB-5724. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Madison Burtan

Providence, RI