



February 25, 2025

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair
House State Government & Elections Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL NO. 5379- AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINALS—
CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS—COMMISSION ON PARDONS**

On behalf of United Way of Rhode Island, we proudly support House Bill 5379, which advances equity and social justice for all Rhode Islanders. Through the ADVOCATE UNITED initiative of our LIVE UNITED 2025 Strategic Plan, we are dedicated to breaking down systemic barriers and championing policies that advance racial, social, and economic justice in every community.

House Bill 5379 is critical to building an inclusive and accountable clemency procedure in Rhode Island. By establishing a commission to promulgate rules, regulations, and recommendations to the Governor regarding pardons, this legislation directly addresses longstanding disparities in the criminal justice system. National research from The Sentencing Project (2020) demonstrates that non-white individuals receive clemency at rates up to four times lower than their white counterparts, highlighting the systemic inequities that undermine the promise of equal justice under the law.

Furthermore, the creation of this commission will ensure that pardons are awarded through a transparent, evidence-based process. By mandating comprehensive data collection on clemency requests and outcomes, House Bill 5379 empowers policymakers to identify and remedy biases in the pardon process. This robust oversight mechanism not only promotes accountability but also reinforces our commitment—through the ADVOCATE UNITED initiative—to dismantle oppressive systems and ensure that every individual's rights are respected, thereby restoring public trust in our criminal justice institutions (The Sentencing Project, 2020).

Equity is the foundation of a just society. Supporting House Bill 5379 will help ensure that all Rhode Islanders have a fair, safe, and transparent engagement with our criminal justice system, particularly in the critical area of pardons. This legislation is vital to creating a more inclusive and just Rhode Island where community safety is prioritized and every individual can thrive. We strongly encourage your support in advancing policies that promote social justice and reform, enhancing both racial equity and public trust in our justice system.

Sincerely,

Uniting our community and resources to build racial equity and opportunities for all Rhode Islanders.

Elijah McLean
Manager, Government Relations & Policy
United Way of Rhode Island

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