



March 6th, 2023

Dear House Judiciary Committee:

I am a Rhode Island voter and a representative from COYOTE RI writing to you today in strong support of H5686. One of COYOTE RI goals is to disturb the incarceration of women & girls. Parents who are separated from their child due to incarceration are negatively affecting whole families, especially the children.

In 1970 Congress passed the [Adoption and Safe Families Act](#). The law ties federal child welfare funding to a requirement that, with a few exceptions, states move to terminate the rights of parents whose children have been in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months. After that period, the children become eligible for adoption. Over the past few decades we have seen RI DCYF fail our youth, house them in institutionalized settings, rather than place the child with a family, which has fueled the foster home to prison pipeline. We have also seen several children die in RI state run homes.

This issue is very personal to me. I was sentenced to 5 years in FL DOC for non violent drug charges in the 90's. I was separated from my daughter from the time she was 4 years old until she was 9 years old. I was fortunate that my parents raised my daughter while I was incarcerated so the state did not get to adopt her out. This affected my daughter negatively. She ended up with a learning disability and spent years in therapy. I was housed at Lowell CI. In Dec 2022 [DOJ issued a report](#) that Lowell had violated the women's constitutional rights by allowing COs to sexual assault the women for decades. They even documented the COs retaliating when DOJ was at Lowell investigating. I was one of the women who was raped by CO's during my time at Lowell, and while this report is over 2 years old, nothing has been done to change things.

COYOTE RI just published two reports, The first report is our [RI Youth report](#). Our 2nd report is [Prostitution and Prostitution-Related Charges in Rhode Island 2000 Present](#). COYOTE RI's research team analyzed tens of thousands of pages of charging documents in RI, to better understand how laws are applied, and who they are applied to. While we only reviewed 22 years of charging documents, we did find two RI women who had each been arrested 25 times each for prostitution. The majority of the women had multi arrests for prostitution or shoplifting, aka misdemeanor poverty offenses. . In fact, the RI DOC 2020 report reveals that 75% of the women

at the ACI are there for nonviolent offenses. We also know that in 2008 the majority of the women being housed at the ACI were arrested for prostitution. Recently we are seeing more and more women in RI being arrested for domestic violence. We assume this is linked to poverty and the fact that the only option the women have upon release is going back to their abuser.

COYOTE RI launched a RI ACI Re-entry program in 2022, we are providing the women being released with case management to get their birth certificates and social security cards so they can get a state ID, and be able to apply for jobs and public services. We also provide the women with gift cards to SAVERS & Stop & Shop, so they can purchase clothing, food and household items. So far we have provided case management and services to over 40 women who have been released from the RI ACI, as our goal is to better understand why they are being arrested, and how we can disrupt the incarceration of women in RI, by providing the women the resources they did not have that led to their incarceration.

Please be part of the solution and vote YES on H5686

Thank you for your time and consideration

Bella Robinson

Tara Burns

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Ramona Flour

Stephanie Soto

COYOTE RI

Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, Rhode Island (COYOTE RI) is a group of current and former sex workers and sex trafficking survivors working on "policy" for improved health and safety for people in Rhode Island's sex industry. Learn more at www.coyoteri.org