



April 4, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Support for House Bill 5180 – Parole Board Membership Reform**

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of The Sentencing Project, I write in strong support of **House Bill 5180**, which proposes a thoughtful and necessary reform to the composition of Rhode Island's Parole Board.

H5180, introduced as the House companion to Senate Bill 292, enhances justice and representation by requiring that at least one member of the Parole Board be a person directly impacted by the criminal legal system—specifically, someone who has completed probation or parole at least three years before their appointment. This individual would also bring professional experience in critical fields such as psychology, mental health, and/or substance use treatment, transitional housing, reentry support, education, or law.

In Rhode Island, 15% of the prison population in the state are serving life sentences, with 198 individuals currently serving life with the possibility of parole, 59 of which are age 55 and older.<sup>1</sup> The sizeable population of people serving life sentences with the possibility of parole calls for the need for parole board reforms that are focused on assessing personal transformation and promoting community safety.<sup>2</sup>

The Sentencing Project believes that parole boards with members who have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system, and have personal experience with rehabilitation and re-entry are uniquely qualified to evaluate an incarcerated person's progress and readiness to return home. Including directly impacted individuals in parole board decision-making is an important step toward building a more humane and effective system. These voices offer invaluable insight into both the rehabilitative process and the challenges of reintegration. Their lived experience deepens the board's understanding of the very people and communities affected by its decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Id.* at 7, 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 3.

At The Sentencing Project, we advocate for parole systems that reflect inclusion, fairness, and practical knowledge. H5180 advances these principles and places Rhode Island at the forefront of equitable reform efforts nationally.

We respectfully urge the House Judiciary Committee to approve H5180 and bring needed representation to Rhode Island's Parole Board.

Thank you for your commitment and leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole D. Porter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Nicole D. Porter**  
Senior Director of Advocacy  
The Sentencing Project