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## **ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT**

### **TESTIMONY ON 26-S 2308, RELATING TO CRIMINALS – CORECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS -- PAROLE May 12, 2026**

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this bill, which provides that incarcerated individuals who committed offenses prior to age eighteen and were sentenced as adults would be eligible for parole after completing fifteen years of their sentence. In allowing an opportunity for parole eligibility after fifteen years, this bill recognizes the special instances surrounding juvenile offenders while still retaining appropriate sentencing and parole discretion.

Obviously, people who commit serious crimes and represent a danger to society deserve punishment. However, the overwhelming number of young offenders, including violent offenders, “age out” of the impulsive actions that often have prompted their commission of the crime for which they are serving time. Imposing extremely long sentences on youthful offenders robs them of rehabilitative hope, an important goal of incarceration. Perhaps most importantly from the state’s – and the taxpayer’s – point of view, it is wasteful in terms of public resources and dollars.

Lengthy prison sentences are often counter-productive, expensive to the taxpaying public, harmful to families, and undermine rehabilitation. There is also a clear discriminatory impact to lengthy sentencing. For example, according to a report from The Sentencing Project, an incredible 59% of the people at the ACI serving life sentences are Black or Latino.<sup>1</sup>

The Sentencing Project has also noted that over 30% of the ACI’s population consists of people who are 55 years of age and older.<sup>2</sup> Prisons across the country, including the ACI, are fast becoming geriatric facilities. A few years ago, in partial recognition of this problem, the General Assembly approved amendments to the state’s “medical parole” statute to address the geriatric consequences of long sentences. Prison facilities do not have the means or capability to serve the medical needs of elderly prisoners, and the public is not served in any way by keeping people locked up for decades – and even in some cases for the last years of life – when they clearly represent no threat to society and have just as clearly “served their time.”

Importantly, this legislation applies retroactively to ensure that individuals who were sentenced prior to enactment are equally eligible for parole review. That is important, since it is irrational to recognize the cruelty of limited eligibility for parole for the future but not the past. It is also critical to note that this legislation does not automatically grant parole, but leaves discretion within the parole board. The ACLU therefore urges the committee’s support for this legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/a-matter-of-life-the-scope-and-impact-of-life-and-long-term-imprisonment-in-the-united-states/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/No-End-in-Sight-Americas-Enduring-Reliance-on-Life-Imprisonment.pdf>, page 22.