

Press Statement by Jim Ryczek, Executive Director

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Support for ACLU RI Injunction on S.O. Proximity Law

The Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless supports the ACLU RI's actions to prevent the new sex offender proximity law from being implemented. We believe enforcement of this law will not be effective, and will result in less safety and accountability in our community.

To be clear, the homeless service sector takes seriously our dedication to serving any person in need of safe shelter each evening in Rhode Island. Our role is to be a respite for those in need of a safe roof over their head, and to work on plans to obtain a permanent safe and affordable place to call home, regardless of background. Furthermore, our sector has always worked collaboratively with community corrections and law enforcement to achieve good public safety. This new law not only imposes a stronger barrier to overcome to help homeless shelter residents obtain housing, but threatens to increase the number of shelter residents by eliminating the stable housing they have and causing them to enter an already overcrowded homeless shelter system.

The three most important factors in reducing sex offender recidivism are stable housing, gainful employment, and comprehensive treatment. Routinely, sex offenders are released by the corrections system into homelessness and are at high risk of living on the streets. Of course, homelessness is not stable housing and severely hampers one's ability to enter treatment and find gainful employment. We encourage public policies that keep constituents in safe and affordable housing where more challenging goals - such as employment and treatment - can more effectively be addressed.

This situation exists due to a lack of comprehensive planning regarding this problem, and public policies that have further constrained locating housing for registered sex offenders. As a result of the further restrictions this law requires, no viable alternatives exist for many sex offenders than entering a homeless shelter. In the case of level III offenders, the only available shelter to them is Harrington Hall in Cranston.

Moreover, there is no evidence proximity laws achieve safer results. In fact, the victim's advocacy organization in Rhode Island, Day One, has gone on the record as having concerns that residency restriction might have the opposite effect. We share those concerns.

Therefore, we support the ALCU of Rhode Island's goal to prevent this law for moving forward since it will not increase public safety, will violate the civil rights of plaintiffs, will cause homelessness, and result in insurmountable challenges in locating safe and stable housing for this homeless constituency.