

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF ARTICLE 15, CHAPTER 13-8
RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES – GERIATRIC PAROLE
March 5, 2020**

The ACLU of Rhode Island is highly supportive of Article 15, Chapter 13-8 which would implement a procedure for geriatric parole in Rhode Island. Aside from the considerable costs this will save both the taxpayer and the state, geriatric parole is the compassionate choice for offenders whose age precludes them from being a significant risk to public safety.

This legislation would continue to grant discretion to the parole board, would not apply to offenders who have been given a sentence of life without parole, and would only render an offender eligible once they have completed the lesser of either ten years or 75% of their sentence length. In the perspective of both national and statewide campaigns to examine the financial and social impacts of mass incarceration, we believe that this proposal is effectively pragmatic and compassionate.

According to the Rhode Island *Blueprint for Smart Justice* report issued by the ACLU, as of June 2018, over 50% of Rhode Island's prison population was serving sentences over 5 years, with 34% of the population serving sentences over 10 years. The longevity of sentence lengths, in addition to the steep decline in parole release considerations – from 44% of parole release considerations granted in 2008 to a 22% grant rate by 2014 – has contributed heavily to the mass incarceration crisis in our state. And, as sentence rates have increased, and parole grants have decreased, corrections costs have ballooned 211% between 1985 and 2017. With a little over 20% of the current sentenced population aged 50 years and up – according to the most recent prison population report issued by RIDOC – this proposal has the ability to very meaningfully impact both the aging incarcerated population and the DOC budget within the upcoming years.

This small yet powerful addition to parole considerations will ensure that the state is not burdening taxpayers to needlessly incarcerate individuals who have served significant portions of their sentence and whose health needs are inconducive to a prison environment. We urge the inclusion of this critical provision in the final budget proposal.

Thank you for your consideration.