

September 26, 2017

The Hon. Gina Raimondo
Governor
State House, Room 224
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Justice Reinvestment Legislation

Dear Governor Raimondo:

Having reviewed the diatribe recently delivered by Attorney General Kilmartin against the passage and signing of parts of the “justice reinvestment” package that will soon be going to your desk for signature, we write to briefly respond and to commend you for your work in organizing the Justice Reinvestment Working Group from which these bills emanated.

As you know, the Working Group – which consisted of literally dozens of stakeholders, including the Attorney General – toiled long and hard to come up with a legislative package designed to promote criminal justice reform in our state. Such reform has been sweeping the country – in red and blue states alike – as more and more political leaders and members of the public realize that the “lock ‘em up” mentality that for decades has pervaded many states’ approach to criminal justice is ineffective, counter-productive and financially wasteful.

The bills going to your desk are the product of a great deal of compromise. Frankly, we wish the bills were stronger than they are, but we recognize that the final result represents a sincere effort by the dozens of people who worked on this to come up with a package that addressed various viewpoints. For the Attorney General to attack this compromise at this late date is not only unseemly for its vitriol, but also hypocritical in light of the many amendments contained in these bills – amendments we did not support – that were made specifically at his behest.

If the Attorney General is truly interested in “moving forward with actual criminal justice reform,” he should be welcoming this package as an important first step, rather than condemning it for seeking to accomplish its purpose.

We know that, as a big booster of justice reinvestment, you recognize that there are many more improvements to the criminal justice system to be made, and we look forward to working with you next year in addressing some of those issues. We also look forward to taking the Attorney General at his word and welcoming his collaboration on further reforms of the system as well.

Some of us served directly on the Working Group, and others of us represent groups working regularly on promoting criminal justice reform, but we all join together in thanking you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Megan Clingham, Mental Health Advocate
Member of the Justice Reinvestment Working Group

Michael Evora, Executive Director
Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights
Member of the Justice Reinvestment Working Group

Mary McElroy, Public Defender
Member of the Justice Reinvestment Working Group

Olin Thompson, Past President
Rhode Island Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
Member of the Justice Reinvestment Working Group

Jim Vincent, President
NAACP – Providence Branch
Member of the Justice Reinvestment Working Group

Rev. Dr. Don Anderson, Executive Minister
Rhode Island State Council of Churches

Steven Brown, Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island

Deborah DeBare, Executive Director
Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Rachel Flum, Executive Director
Economic Progress Institute

Collin Geiselman, President
Rhode Island Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Roberta Richman
Retired, Asst. Director of Rehabilitation and Community Corrections, RIDOC