



128 DORRANCE STREET, SUITE 400  
PROVIDENCE, RI 02903  
401.831.7171 (t)  
401.831.7175 (f)  
[www.riaclu.org](http://www.riaclu.org) | [info@riaclu.org](mailto:info@riaclu.org)

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 16-S 5, S-6, S-7, S-8, S-9, S-10, AND S-11,  
RELATING TO JUSTICE REINVESTMENT  
January 19, 2017**

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports the Committee's passage of this important package of justice reinvestment bills, which were also approved by the Senate last year.

It is worth recalling that this package of bills sprang from the Governor's large and broadly inclusive Justice Reinvestment Working Group, and followed nearly a year's worth of work between dozens of government officials and community advocates. By, among other things, clarifying the definition of misdemeanor and felony and amending the appropriate penalties, adjusting the procedures for the implementation and use of probation and parole, and establishing a Superior Court diversion program, this package is an important first step in promoting much-needed criminal justice reform in the state.

It is a first step because, it must be emphasized, these bills are the product of a good deal of compromise and are quite weaker than the recommendations that initially came out of the Working Group. But they set a very positive standard for the General Assembly to use and follow in the years ahead as, we trust, more efforts are made to modernize our criminal justice system in recognition that the current system is broken. It is broken because virtually everybody involved in the system recognizes it is unsound from both a fiscal and policy perspective. Presently, vast state resources are unnecessarily expended on gratuitously long prison sentences and conditions of supervision that promote neither public safety nor individual rehabilitation. Instead, the most lasting and damaging impact of overly punitive policies is on the families of those brought into the criminal justice system, who themselves become victims of the harsh punishment their loved ones receive.

We appreciate the effort that the Governor and so many other people have made, through this package, to begin to reverse that long-standing trend. We also applaud the Senate's strong public commitment to enacting this legislation. We urge the committee's swift passage of this package and hope that it will lead to additional reforms in the months and years ahead.