

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO 20 – H 7026, 20 – H 7027, AND 20 – H 7033
January 28, 2020

The ACLU has been consistent in our criticism of bills that lend themselves to the continuance of the statehouse-to-prison pipeline by either creating new crimes or increasing penalties for crimes which already exist. Such legislation counteracts the important work of criminal justice reform, as new crimes and increased sentences are often arbitrary and almost always unnecessary. Three bills up for hearing today – H 7026, H 7027, and H 7033 – build upon this damaging trend and would needlessly bolster mass incarceration rather than address the need for reform of the criminal justice system.

Although these three bills vary in their specific provisions and impacts, they nonetheless have in common their intention to more severely punish offenders of certain crimes which already carry considerable penalties. Especially in the context of national trends towards de-incarceration, and recent Rhode Island state campaigns to critically examine the impact, fiscal and otherwise, that legislation has on our prison system, now is not the time for the General Assembly to consider increasing even more criminal penalties and punishments.

The imposition of more severe, unjustifiable penalties on offenders only serves to impact the offender's life, and those of their family members, for years to come. In a report issued by our organization in early 2018, we found that the General Assembly created over 170 new crimes and increased the criminal sentences for dozens of existing offenses over the course of less than two decades. This overzealous and indiscriminate approach to criminal justice reverberates across thousands of lives.

We encourage the committee to read our report concerning this serious problem, *Rhode Island's Statehouse-To-Prison Pipeline*, which is available on our website at riaclu.org. In the meantime, we urge the committee to summarily reject bills like these which will have little deterrent effect on crime but will severely impact efforts to promote real criminal justice reform in the state.

Thank you for your consideration.