

Testimony in Support of HB 7198, HB 7202, & HB 7360

House Judiciary Committee

March 4, 2026

Hector Perez-Aponte, Racial Justice Policy Analyst, the Economic Progress Institute

The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Representative Felix’s HB 7198, Representative Potter’s HB 7202, and Representative Batista’s HB 7360 that would protect Rhode Islanders from unnecessary deportations and protect their rights under the U.S. Constitution.

Rhode Islanders value fairness, and we care about our neighbors. Immigrants are a vital part of Rhode Island’s communities and economy. Over 160,000 immigrants live in Rhode Island, and immigrant workers accounted for 16% of the state’s GDP.¹² **Undocumented people specifically were shown to have paid roughly \$95 million in RI state and local taxes in 2022.**³ In 2023, the Immigrant Research Initiative found that 20% of Rhode Island’s business owners were immigrants.⁴

Minor mistakes shouldn’t lead to life-altering consequences. Under immigration law, minor convictions that are punishable by a year or more in prison may lead to detention, denial of necessary forms of immigration relief, and deportation for immigrants; these can include misdemeanor crimes like damaging a fire hydrant or shoplifting. **Rep. Felix’s HB 7198 (“364 misdemeanor bill”)** would protect Rhode Islanders from unnecessarily harsh immigration consequences for minor offenses by decreasing the maximum penalty for a misdemeanor from 365 to 364 days of incarceration. Additionally, this bill would protect vulnerable members of our immigrant community, including asylum seekers and victims of domestic violence, who could otherwise be barred from immigration relief due to a misdemeanor conviction. States like New York, Minnesota, and Nevada have made similar changes to their criminal laws to safeguard residents from unjust immigration penalties.⁵

Deportations are devastating. If deported, those with lawful status may experience a permanent bar from reentering the U.S. without special permission.⁶ In some cases, legal permanent residents (LPRs) live in “mixed-status households” with U.S. children. **When LPRs are deported, many are forced to take their children with them or leave them behind –**

¹ <https://immresearch.org/publications/50-states-immigrants-by-number-and-share/>

² Immigrant share of economic output is estimated by showing the share of all earned income – wages plus proprietors’ earnings. The data source is the 2023 American Community Survey, five-year data.

³ <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>

⁴ IRI Analysis of 2023 American Community Survey, five-year data.

⁵ <https://fortunesociety.org/one-day-to-protect-ny/#:~:text=On%20Law.com%2C%20read%20an,of%20one%20year%20or%20longer.;>

https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/final-sb1310_sb1242.pdf;

<https://minnesotareformer.com/2023/07/03/legislature-reduces-misdemeanor-sentence-by-1-day-with-big-ramifications-for-some-immigrants/#:~:text=Minnesota%20law%2C%20until%20Saturday%2C%20had,raise%20the%20risk%20of%20deportati>

https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/final-sb1310_sb1242.pdf;

⁶ <https://www.hdezlaw.com/blog/2025/06/how-criminal-charges-can-affect-your-immigration-status/>

effectively deporting U.S. citizens and/or breaking up families.⁷ Along with tearing communities and families apart, deportations can have negative consequences on a state's economy. Deportations often lead to labor shortages, which can increase the cost of goods and cause businesses to shrink.⁸ Research has shown that increases in immigration enforcement can also lead to a contraction in the direct care sector – Rhode Island's largest employment sector.⁹ At a time when immigrant communities feel under attack, passing **HB 7189** would be a huge victory for Rhode Island communities.

Representative Potter's HB 7202, the RI Federal Constitution Defense Act, would establish a state-level cause of action allowing individuals to bring claims in Rhode Island state courts against federal officials who violate their rights under the United States Constitution while acting in Rhode Island. Currently, Rhode Island law provides no direct state remedy for holding federal officials accountable in state court for constitutional violations. The bill applies only to federal officials and creates no new liability for state or local officials.

The need for this bill is especially clear in light of recent reports involving encounters between Americans and agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), including allegations of warrantless home entries, detentions of U.S. citizens, and aggressive enforcement actions carried out in residential neighborhoods.¹⁰¹¹ When federal agents overstep constitutional limits, people often face significant legal barriers to seeking justice in federal court. HB 7202 would help ensure that Rhode Islanders have a meaningful, local avenue for accountability, reinforcing that constitutional rights are not theoretical guarantees but enforceable protections.

Lastly, we support **Representative Batista's HB 7360**, which would protect people attending Rhode Island court proceedings from civil arrest without a judicial warrant. This protection ensures that Rhode Islanders can participate in state court proceedings without fear of arrest or detention for immigration matters. This will also increase public confidence in the justice system, safeguard access to justice and reinforce the principle that courthouses must remain spaces where everyone can engage with the legal process safely and fairly.

Collectively, these bills will promote greater equity in Rhode Island, as communities of color are disproportionately targeted by the criminal justice system, even though immigrants are less likely than U.S.-born people to commit crimes.¹² According to a report released by the U.S. Committee on Immigration and Refugees, although Black immigrants commit crimes at similar rates to other immigrant populations, they are far more likely to be detained and deported on criminal grounds.¹³ These deportations can lead to a serious increase in financial instability for families

⁷ <https://nipnlg.org/news/press-releases/us-children-are-being-forced-deportation-public-deserves-truth>

⁸ <https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/117980/documents/HHRG-119-GO00-20250305-SD020.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.epi.org/blog/trumps-deportation-plans-threaten-400000-direct-care-jobs-older-adults-and-people-with-disabilities-could-lose-vital-in-home-support/>

¹⁰ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ices-secret-warrantless-home-entry-policy/#:~:text=Two%20whistleblowers%20recently%20revealed%20a,home%20to%20make%20an%20arrest.>

¹¹ <https://www.propublica.org/article/immigration-dhs-american-citizens-arrested-detained-against-will>

¹² <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/myth-immigrant-criminality-and-paradox-assimilation>

¹³ <https://refugees.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Policy-and-Advocacy-Report-5.10.21.pdf>

and children across our state. For instance, a study of immigration enforcement in six U.S. states between 2006 and 2009 found that families lost 40 to 90 percent of their income within six months of a parent's deportation.¹⁴ Furthermore, under the current administration, immigrants across all statuses have been facing more scrutiny and harsher enforcement measures. All this, despite making significant contributions to our economy and communities.¹⁵

None of these bills have any cost to the state, yet they would all make a huge positive impact. We urge the Committee to pass these bills to protect Rhode Islanders' rights and safety.

¹⁴ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/us-citizen-children-impacted-immigration-enforcement#:~:text=An%20analysis%20of%202018%20Census,Parental%20Interests%20Directive%20in%202013.>

¹⁵ <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>