

## Testimony in Support of SB-2622 – Minimum Wage for Incarcerated People Senate Labor and Gaming Committee

May 6, 2026

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**The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Senator Mack’s SB-2622**, which would increase the minimum wage amount for any person committed to the adult correctional institution from three dollars to five dollars a day.

Rhode Islanders value hard work and fairness, and everyone deserves fair compensation for their work, regardless of their social status. These values should extend to incarcerated individuals who should be treated with the same respect as any other class of essential workers. State agencies, non-profits, cities and towns purchase products such as jackets, uniforms, helmets, and shoes, which are deemed “Prison Made Goods and Services.”<sup>12</sup> Although our state government and private industries benefit from prison labor, prisoners are not compensated nearly enough for the work they perform. Currently, **prisoners in Rhode Island make as low as \$0.29 per hour.**<sup>3</sup> According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s (MIT) Living Wage Calculator, **a living wage for a single adult with no kids seeking reentry in 2026 would need to be \$25.99 per hour** in Washington County, RI alone.<sup>4</sup>

Worse still, incarcerated individuals are subject to fees, commonly referred to as “pay-to-stay” fees, which decrease the amount of income they have upon release.<sup>5</sup> These fees may include costs related to “room and board,” court costs, restitution, and sustaining prisons. Furthermore, these fees can also extend to phone calls, hygiene products (which are given only under certain conditions), and medical care.<sup>6</sup> To afford a phone call, **some prisoners must work as much 1.5 hours to speak with their loved ones!**<sup>7</sup> With Black and Latino individuals being more likely to be incarcerated than any other demographic, these low wages paid to incarcerated people exacerbate racial disparities within the justice system.<sup>8</sup>

**Ensuring that individuals are released with a modest sum in savings can increase the likelihood of achieving financial stability and reduce the chances of recidivism.**<sup>9</sup> Although

<sup>1</sup> <https://correctionalindustries.doc.ri.gov/about-0>

<sup>2</sup> <https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/Statutes/TITLE13/13-7/INDEX.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rilegislature.gov/senators/SenateComDocs/Judiciary/S0128%20Worth%20Rises%20-%20RI%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/44009>

<sup>5</sup> <https://finesandfeesjusticecenter.org/articles/americas-dystopian-incarceration-system-of-pay-to-stay-behind-bars/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/news/human-rights/captive-labor-exploitation-of-incarcerated-workers#:~:text=We%20must%20raise%20incarcerated%20workers,eventual%20reentry%20into%20the>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rilegislature.gov/senators/SenateComDocs/Judiciary/S0128%20Worth%20Rises%20-%20RI%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/RI.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://harvardpolitics.com/recidivism-american-progress/>

not comprehensive enough, **SB-2622** is a desperately needed step forward towards more humane and meaningful working conditions for incarcerated individuals. We strongly urge passage.