

220 West Exchange Street, Suite 007  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903  
Telephone: 401-274-4940  
Facsimile: 401-274-494  
[www.rinasw.info](http://www.rinasw.info)  
[rhodeislandnasw@gmail.com](mailto:rhodeislandnasw@gmail.com)

Date: March 8, 2017  
To: House Judiciary Committee  
RE: In Opposition of H-5210 and H-5258

***“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” ~ Anne Frank ~***

The National Association of Social Workers – Rhode Island Chapter is in opposition to H-5210 and H-5258. In my over 30 years working with homeless youth, adults and families, I believe our limited taxpayer resources would be much better spent within human services and law enforcement by developing supported housing and supported employment services than by enforcing the laws that these bills would establish.

The causes of homelessness are complicated and systemic and require more resources than are currently allocated. Quite the contrary, we have gutted the nationally recognized community based mental health system of the 1980s and 1990s, the extensive support employment system we once had, and the supported housing system that we work so hard to build....even as the Rhode Island economy has been improving. This has resulted more and more individuals and families being forced to find alternatives to make ends meet to survive.

H-5258 can only lead eventually to imprisonment and to a “modern-day debtor’s prison” reminiscent of Charles Dickens, certainly not to help. H-5210 is draconian in nature and nearly unenforceable, and certainly in the opinion of this writer not a good use of our law enforcement resources.

Without proper support and more investment by this General Assembly, we will end up with institutions of last resort where Charles Dickens describes one such institution in one my favorite, but one of his least read stories “*A Walk in a Workhouse*”:

***“Upon the whole, it was the dragon, Pauperism, in a very weak and impotent condition; toothless, fangless, drawing his breath heavily enough, and hardly worth chaining up.” (Charles Dickens 1850)***

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Harris, LICSW  
Executive Director