April 23, 2019

Chairman Craven  
House Judiciary Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island, 02903

Re: H5863 -- Relating to Labor and Labor Relations -- Licensing

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Committee,

As Executive Director of the Providence Human Relations Commission, I write to you today in support of House Bill 5863.

Impaneled in 1963, the Providence Human Relations Commission works to protect and expand residents' rights to fair housing, education, employment, credit and public accommodations, free from discrimination.

A conviction record is a scarlet letter with respects to employment. The Department of Justice reports that individuals who have been incarcerated can expect their future earnings reduced by approximately 40 percent after they return to their communities. Racial disparities in the criminal justice system—which result in higher rates of incarceration and harsher sentencing for people of color—and exclusionary policies, such as occupational licensing bans, are responsible for the labor market inequalities that individuals with records face. The unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated people is nearly six times that of the unemployment rate for the general United States population, with working-age "prison penalties" increasing unemployment rates anywhere from 14% for white men, to 37% for black women when compared to their general population peers. In Rhode Island, 66% of licensed jobs have some form of conviction-based barrier built into the license application process. Reforming occupational licensing laws, as proposed in House Bill 5863, stands to change the very real material impact these barriers have on our communities, lowering recidivism and creating stable lifelines for individuals locked out of accessing a myriad of basic support services due to former convictions.

The passage of H5863 is a critical step in expanding opportunity for residents routinely denied access to gainful employment when re-entering our communities. I urge you to pass H5863.

Respectfully submitted,

Sol Taubin  
Executive Director  
Providence Human Relations Commission