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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 25-H 5487, AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- OFFENSES PERTAINING TO SCHOOLS March 4, 2025

The ACLU of Rhode Island wishes to express its support for this legislation, which would prohibit college or university consideration of “legacy status” in making admissions decisions, a practice that has contributed to long-standing disparities and inequality in higher education.

College should be accessible to everyone, regardless of background or socioeconomic status, but unfortunately, that is not the reality for all students. For many low-income and BIPOC students in particular, the road to college is filled with roadblocks that are deeply rooted in our country’s history of systemic inequity. This troubled path for many of these students begins with poorly funded urban schools, high rates of poverty, inadequate test preparation, and unaffordable tuition, just to name a few. But the barriers to admission don’t end there.

Many of these students compete for limited spots at universities that use “legacy status” as a factor when weighing admissions — a practice that disproportionately gives preference to white and wealthy student applicants whose family member is an alumni of the college or university they’re applying to, and who have already benefitted from greater access to educational resources. Ending these legacy admissions practices is a critical step that can help address long-standing disparities and inequality in higher education while increasing access for underrepresented students who have been historically shut out.

For these reasons, the ACLU of RI supports this bill.