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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5616, AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH March 13, 2025

This one-sentence bill provides that it “should be the public policy of the state that no public health advertisement or regulation shall explicitly or implicitly state that there is a safe way to take illegal drugs.” The ACLU of Rhode Island opposes this bill because we believe it runs counter to the harm reduction strategy that this state has endorsed as a way of dealing with drug problems.

Among other things, over the years the General Assembly has decriminalized the possession of needles, approved a Good Samaritan law for reporting drug overdoses, and became the first state in the country to approve an overdose prevention center. All of these measures, adopted with the support of the Department of Health, and the regulations implementing them, can be read as promoting a “safe,” or at least “safer,” way to use illegal drugs. With marijuana still classified as an unlawful drug at the federal level, state regulations or public support for the medical marijuana program would appear to be improper under this bill.

Because this legislation could have the effect of questioning or derailing many of the steps that the state has taken in recent years to address drug issues other than with a prohibitory approach, we urge its rejection. Thank you for considering our views.