



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

**TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5614,
RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS – NURSES
April 23, 2025**

This bill makes various amendments to the statutes governing the licensing of speech language pathologists and audiologists. The ACLU of Rhode Island has no position on the overall intent of this bill, but we do wish to flag a concern about language that is being formally recodified in the law, as we believe it should no longer be included in light of other recent statutory developments governing occupational licensing.

We wish to point to two provisions in particular. First, we note the deletion and reinstatement of language requiring that a candidate for licensure be “of good moral character.” [Page 8, line 1 and Page 16, line 11]. We have consistently voiced concerns about standards for professional licensure that are overly vague and could lead to arbitrary denial of licenses, including “good moral character” language which, in addition, could allow for inappropriately expansive consideration of an applicant’s past criminal record, which may be outdated or irrelevant.

That leads directly to our second concern about language being reinstated, because we believe it is in tension with the state’s Fair Chance Licensing law, R.I.G.L. 28-5.1-14. This is the law that restricts the use of criminal record information in occupational licensing to offenses which are directly related to the occupation being sought. We refer to Page 11, line 9, which recodifies language being removed elsewhere in the bill that a person can be denied a speech language pathology or audiology license for “[b]eing convicted of, or pleading guilty or nolo contendere to, a felony. . .” For a number of years, the Fair Chance Licensing law has prohibited use of such broad standards to deny a license based on a criminal record. Instead, as noted above, that law allows criminal records to be considered only if they are directly related to the license being issued, and even then, various factors must be taken into account before denying a license on that basis. Under no circumstances, however, should a person be considered for license denial solely because they have a felony criminal record.

We would therefore urge the committee to amend this provision in the bill to explicitly reference the fair chance licensing statute and its standards rather than referencing all felonies as a basis for license denial.

Thank you for considering our views.