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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 6244, RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY – ABUSE IN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES May 1, 2025

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports this bill, which would prohibit healthcare personnel from asking the legal immigration status of any patient. This legislation is especially appropriate and timely, given the virulent anti-immigrant policies emanating from Washington, D.C. and a recent incident that occurred at Rhode Island Hospital.

As a result of the federal government's xenophobic policies, immigrant individuals and families may forego necessary medical services out of fear of putting themselves or their families at risk. People in need of medical attention should not have to choose between seeking help and jeopardizing their safety. In ensuring that healthcare personnel will not ask about immigration status, patients can take comfort in the fact that they can receive necessary care without putting their loved ones or themselves at risk.

Further, the possibility of discrimination against legal immigrants, permanent residents, and even U.S. citizens is greatly increased when healthcare personnel can make inquiries like these. Such inquiries are often a proxy for discriminating against individuals based on their appearance, surname, ethnicity, race, or similar inappropriate characteristics.

The recent highly publicized incident where ICE officials brought an immigrant to Rhode Island Hospital after allegedly tasing him, and the response this incident generated in the community, only emphasizes the need for legislation like this to provide at least a modicum of protection to that community.

Patient confidentiality is a core tenet in providing healthcare. Healthcare personnel should not be expected to play the role of immigration enforcement agents, as it undermines the trust required to provide quality care. Everyone deserves access to healthcare without the threat of discrimination or deportation. This legislation reaffirms that healthcare should be available to everyone, regardless of immigration status or where they were born.

Thank you for considering our views.