



State of Rhode Island COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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TESTIMONY

BILL NO.: 2024 H 7099
BILL TITLE: Acts Relating to Motor and Other Vehicles – Comprehensive
Community-Police Relationship Act of 2015
PRIMARY SPONSOR: Representative Edith Ajello
COMMITTEE: House Committee on Judiciary
DATE: 2/8/24

The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) supports this bill.

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. Commission staff members, including myself, have actively participated in the effort to identify and eradicate racial profiling in police traffic stops and searches since the 1990s.

Nearly a decade ago, the General Assembly passed the Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act of 2015 (CCPRA), a historic bill which was the product of years of collaboration and compromise between community stakeholders and law enforcement officials in the ongoing effort to address racial profiling on Rhode Island’s streets and highways. The CCPRA lapsed in 2020. This bill – the product of several months of dialogue between community and law enforcement in the latter half of 2021 – seeks to build on the advances made via the CCPRA. That proposed amendments would, among other things:

- require continued data collection relative to traffic stops and searches by state and municipal police, and require analysis of that data by the Department of Transportation/Office of Highway Safety (OHS);
- create a 12-member Advisory Committee which would, in part, advise OHS on matters related to data collection and analysis, review annual traffic stop/search data, recommend policies for stops and searches by law enforcement, and recommend appropriate enforcement mechanisms to address study results;
- mandate that OHS, with input from the Advisory Committee, issue guidelines for municipal police departments and the State Police to follow in preparing annual reports on traffic stops/searches conducted by their respective departments;

- mandate that OHS issue quarterly summary reports on the data collected throughout the state;

- mandate that OHS, with input from the Advisory Committee, contract with a qualified person or entity to conduct an annual analysis of the data collected in order to identify any racial disparities in stops and searches;

- require OHS to present the annual data in an online interface designed to enhance public interaction with the data;

- require the head of each law enforcement agency collecting data to provide an annual report to OHS and to the Advisory Committee on data collection efforts and steps taken to address any racial disparities established by the data.

By incorporating means to ensure departmental compliance with the law's provisions, this bill ensures that traffic stop/search data will continue to be collected and analyzed in the effort to effectively address racial profiling in Rhode Island, and that appropriate steps are taken in response to noted disparities. The bill incorporates mechanisms to create uniformity and regularity with respect to the reporting of data. The bill also promotes community involvement in the data collection, analysis and dissemination process by creating an Advisory Committee, thereby giving community stakeholders a voice in the effort to identify and remedy policing practices which affect them directly, advancing bias-free policing throughout the state. Finally, the contemplated online interface would foster transparency and create ease of access to collected and analyzed data.

For these reasons, the Commission urges passage of this bill.

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