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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 24-H 7305, RELATING TO RHODE ISLAND FAIR HOUSING PRACTICES ACT March 27, 2024

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this bill, which corrects a decade-old error addressing the scope of the state's Fair Housing Practices Act (FHPA). In 2012, the General Assembly enacted legislation declaring that discrimination on the basis of "housing status," like discrimination on the basis of race, sex, etc., was a violation of FHPA. In doing so, however, the legislation inadvertently neglected to add that term to the other provisions of the statute giving the state human rights commission the authority to investigate claims of discrimination on that basis.

In short, the law declares this class of vulnerable individuals as being protected from discrimination, but then mistakenly fails to provide any remedial options. Passing this bill will right that obvious wrong.

The bill also amends FHPA in dealing with service animals in order to comport with requirements of federal law. We understand that this provision generated controversy last year. If, for whatever reason, it continues to do so, we would urge the committee to pass the rest of the bill so as to at least erase the General Assembly's mistake in 2012 in only partially protecting unhoused individuals from discrimination.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.