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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5357, RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT – CORRECTIONS DEPARTMENT February 25, 2025

The ACLU of RI appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of this legislation which would repeal a discriminatory law that unfairly targets sex workers.

The law being repealed was enacted more than fifteen years ago. It imposes additional court fines specifically and solely on individuals charged with prostitution-related offenses. Merely reciting the statute's content should be sufficient to indicate its complete unfairness. Singling out a victimless crime for additional punishment is bad in and of itself, but to single out a crime that overwhelmingly impacts women is unconscionable. This extra dose of punishment was inappropriate when it was first enacted; it remains just as inappropriate today and deserves repeal at the earliest possible opportunity.

In supporting passage of this legislation, we also urge the committee to consider the additional findings and recommendations of the special legislative commission that exhaustively examined this issue a few years ago. There are many other unfair laws on this topic that single out sex workers for discriminatory treatment and that should also be addressed.

In sum, passage of this bill should be considered a first step in righting the wrongs that exist in the Rhode Island General Laws in their discriminatory treatment of individuals who engage in this activity. We urge its approval.

Thank you for considering our views.