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Mayor



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Chair Carol McEntee and Members  
House Judiciary Committee  
Rhode Island General Assembly

**RE: Opposition to H7353 – Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act of 2015**

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this letter in opposition to **H7353**, legislation that would amend Rhode Island's Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act of 2015 by expanding traffic stop data collection requirements, mandating additional reporting, and requiring annual studies related to racial disparities in traffic enforcement.

While I support transparency, accountability, and fair and impartial policing, I have significant concerns that this legislation will not achieve its stated intent and may instead lead to misleading conclusions, increased division, and unnecessary conflict between law enforcement and the communities we serve.

Similar studies conducted in other jurisdictions have repeatedly failed to definitively identify racial profiling. **Traffic stop data studies cannot conclusively prove or disprove the existence of racial profiling.** These studies can only identify *potential disparities* in stop-and-search data. Disparities alone, however, do not equate to unlawful profiling.

A primary issue is that the methodology relies heavily on an officer's perception of a driver's race or ethnicity. This is based on the flawed assumption that officers can accurately determine race prior to initiating a traffic stop. In reality, that is often not possible. Many stops occur at night, in poor lighting, at high speeds, from the rear of a vehicle, or based on driving behaviors where the operator is not visible until after the stop has already been initiated.

Because of these limitations, the conclusions drawn from these studies are inherently speculative and subject to broad interpretation.

Traffic stop studies are often interpreted differently depending on the reader's perspective. Advocates for minority communities may view disparities as proof of profiling, while law enforcement may view them as the result of enforcement patterns, roadway safety concerns, crime trends, or other legitimate variables. As a result, these reports often become controversial rather than constructive.

Instead of strengthening police-community relationships, these studies can unintentionally create additional tension and distrust—further dividing communities rather than unifying them.

A major concern is that the bill does not require a corresponding **driving population study**, which is critical.

The driving population in many Rhode Island municipalities changes drastically by season, time of day, commuting patterns, tourism, and special events. Census data does not reflect the actual driving population traveling through a community at any given time. Without an accurate baseline, conclusions about racial disparities in traffic stops may be significantly flawed and can lead to inaccurate public perceptions and policy decisions.

H7353 also allows analysis at an 85% confidence level, rather than the more widely accepted 90% or higher threshold typically expected in academic and professional statistical standards.

Lowering the confidence level increases the likelihood of unreliable findings and false conclusions. If Rhode Island is going to publish annual statewide studies that influence policy decisions and public trust, those studies should meet the highest statistical standards, not reduced ones.

The Cranston Police Department, like many agencies across Rhode Island, already closely monitors traffic stops and searches to identify potential racial or ethnic disparities. Police administrations regularly review enforcement activity and analyze available data to determine whether disparities exist, investigate potential causes, and take corrective action when warranted.

Importantly, many variables may contribute to disparities beyond bias-based policing, including, but not limited to, traffic volume, commuter patterns, crime trends, roadway complaints, targeted enforcement initiatives, and differences in driving behavior. Without properly accounting for these factors, raw stop data can easily be misunderstood and misrepresented.

If Rhode Island is going to invest public funds to strengthen community-police relations, the most effective approach is not additional studies that generate conflict and uncertain conclusions. Instead, funding should be directed toward microgrants for police departments and community organizations to support outreach programs and engagement events.

These efforts provide meaningful opportunities for officers and community members to interact in positive settings, improve mutual understanding, and strengthen public trust. Such programs directly enhance police legitimacy and create lasting improvements in community relations.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose **H7353**. The bill expands a flawed data-driven framework that cannot definitively identify racial profiling, lacks proper baseline driving population comparisons, lowers statistical reliability standards, and risks increasing mistrust rather than improving police-community relations.

Rhode Island should prioritize proven, practical strategies that promote transparency and trust—such as body-worn cameras, training, accountability, strong policies, and meaningful community outreach.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my concerns. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further or provide additional input.

Respectfully,

*Col. Michael J. Winqist*

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