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## **ACLU OF RI POSITION: AMEND**

### **TESTIMONY ON 26-H 7487, RELATING TO ANIMALS AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY -- DOGS February 11, 2026**

The ACLU of Rhode Island has no position on some of the amendments being made by this bill to various statutes relating to the protection of dogs, but we do oppose a provision that would make it a felony for a person to violate a “care of dogs” statute a second time. See Page 3, lines 21-23.

The ACLU of Rhode Island has long been concerned about the “statehouse to prison pipeline.” This refers to the pervasiveness of the passage of laws creating new crimes or increasing criminal penalties for various existing offenses without compelling reason. In addition to the expense to the taxpayers, these increased penalties help fuel the twin problems of overcriminalization and mass incarceration without providing any significant corresponding benefit to public safety. We believe the increased penalty in this bill fits within that category and should therefore be rejected.

The types of conduct that constitute abuse under this statute, while not to be condoned, simply do not necessarily rise to a level that warrants giving an individual a felony record with all the damaging collateral consequences that flow from it. For example, one may believe that keeping a dog in an “area” for more than 14 hours or tethering a dog at night for more than 15 minutes may warrant punishment, but committing two of those acts, potentially over a period of many years, does not justify felony charges in our view. A year in prison should be more than sufficient, whether it is viewed as a deterrent or punishment. We therefore urge the deletion of this enhanced penalty provision.

Thank you for considering our views on this bill.