



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

ACLU OF RI POSITION: AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 8079, AN ACT RELATING TO JURY LISTS April 9, 2026

This bill would add individuals receiving public assistance benefits to the rolls of people sent to the state jury commissioner to be placed into the pool for possible jury service.

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports the intent of the bill. It is no secret that the vast majority of jury cases on the criminal side involve low-income individuals, and having people on public assistance serve on those juries would likely better help ensure that these defendants are being evaluated by a jury of their peers.

At the same time, we also know that, for good reason, there are very strict confidentiality rules in place at the federal and state level designed to protect the privacy of individuals receiving public assistance. We are concerned that this legislation might run afoul of those protections and intrude on protected privacy rights.

We would therefore encourage the committee to investigate this issue before taking any action on this bill. We consider both of these competing interests to be of value, but would not like to see the confidentiality expectations of people receiving public assistance unintentionally violated. At a minimum, we would suggest amending the bill in accordance with the suggested language below, which would ensure that this legislation does not inadvertently run afoul of the law.

Thank you for considering our views.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO H-8079

1. On Page 2, delete lines 16-17 and substitute the following language: “(f) To the extent authorized by state and federal law and in accordance with all confidentiality provisions for sharing such information, the department of human services shall forward on a yearly basis to the jury commissioner the names of all individuals who are receiving public assistance benefits as defined in R.I.G.L. 40-6-1.”; and

2. On Page 4, line 10, after the word “benefits” add the words “as defined in R.I.G.L. 40-6-1”.