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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 8061, RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES – JAILS AND PRISONS April 16, 2026

This bill would make it a crime, punishable by ten years in prison, for any person, without permission, to convey to a juvenile in the custody of the Training School “any drugs, tobacco, portable electronic communication device, or any article that could be used as a weapon.” The ACLU of Rhode Island urges rejection of this legislation because of its failure to recognize the significant difference between the illegal items listed.

While we can appreciate DCYF’s interest in avoiding the smuggling of contraband into the prison, we simply do not believe that a person sneaking a pack of cigarettes to a 17-year-old resident at the Training School should be treated the same as another person trying to surreptitiously smuggle in a knife. Under this bill, however, they would face the same potential sentence, and a significant sentence at that. Further, the bill’s application to “any article that could be used as a weapon” could apply to a wide variety of innocuous items that simply do not warrant the draconian punishment envisioned by this bill.

By mirroring the severe penalties applicable to “hardened criminals” at the ACI, this bill only reinforces the notion that the Training School is more like a prison than most state officials would like to claim. If there is a legitimate concern that current laws do not impose any penalties for smuggling a gun into the Training School, legislation may very well be in order. But the lack of nuance in this bill is of deep concern to us, and we therefore oppose it.

Thank you for considering our views.