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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE IN PART

TESTIMONY ON 24-H 7183, A RESOLUTION RELATING TO TERM LIMITS FOR LEGISLATORS January 23, 2024

The ACLU of RI has no position on the provisions of this proposed constitutional amendment that would expand House and Senate terms to four years. However, we do oppose the provision that would set term limits for both state Senators and Representatives.

The ACLU has long argued against attempts to establish term limits for political office. Rhode Island, like every other state, already has a term limit mechanism in place: Election Day. If voters are dissatisfied with their elected officials, they can make that dissatisfaction known at election time. Term limits can penalize some of the most qualified officials who earn the public's trust to serve for a long period of time and who also develop necessary expertise through their length of service. In states where term limits have been established for legislative office, the net effect can often be to give third parties, such as lobbyists and government bureaucrats, even more influence in the process than they otherwise have or should have.

If the concern prompting this proposal is that too many elections are uncontested, that is a legitimate concern. However, in our view, the solution is not to limit the public's choices, but to find ways to encourage more people to run.

We appreciate your consideration of our views.