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ACLU OF RI POSITION: AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5714, AN ACT RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- VITAL RECORDS March 13, 2025

This one-sentence bill provides that “[t]he race of a person appearing on a certificate of birth may be modified by the state registrar of vital records if it is determined by the director that a modification is justified.”

While we can certainly understand circumstances when birth certificate information regarding a person’s race might warrant correction, we believe the legislation should set out at least a minimal process for doing this. For instance, as written, the bill would allow the Department of Health to change a person’s race designation without formally notifying the affected person it was making that change. It could make the change against the person’s own wishes based solely on the Department’s own determination that it is justified.

We would therefore urge the reasons and mechanisms for making such a change should be spelled out more clearly in the bill in light of the importance and personal aspect of one’s race designation. Thank you for considering our views.