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ACLU POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5715, RELATING TO PUBLIC OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES – RETIREMENT SYSTEM— ADMINISTRATION April 22, 2025

This bill would require the state Retirement Board to post recordings of its meetings on the employees' retirement system website. The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this bill for promoting government transparency.

Rhode Island's Open Meetings Act requires meetings of public bodies to be open to public view, but presently has no requirement that they either livestream or record their meetings. Despite this absence of a statutory requirement, many public bodies have taken this step towards greater transparency in this post-Covid era. In a recent survey of city and town councils and school committees that our organization conducted, we found that 36 of 39 municipal councils record their meetings for public viewing, and 29 of 34 school committees do so.¹

Access to the democratic process should no longer hinge on a person's physical mobility or their ability to afford a car, get time off work, or find a childcare provider. Allowing members of the public to watch meetings on their own time can be easily done and thereby promote the Open Meetings Act's goal of having "public business be performed in an open and public manner." For these reasons, we support this legislation and hope it will serve as a model for other state public bodies to follow.

¹ "Remote Access to Public Meetings Post-Covid: A Review of Rhode Island City and Town Councils and School Committees," February 2025. <https://www.riaclu.org/en/publications/report-update-remote-access-public-meetings-post-covid-february-2025>