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## ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

### TESTIMONY ON 26-H 7236, AN ACT RELATING TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY – THE EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT AND BUDGET EQUITY IMPACT ACT

January 27, 2026

As the legacy of legislation has shown throughout the years, oftentimes a facially neutral policy can have devastating consequences on certain demographics – a fact that has been shown time and time again in examinations of housing policy, criminal justice policy, education policy and more throughout the decades. This has led to long-lasting and deeply rooted discriminatory implications for BIPOC communities in particular.

For that reason, we strongly support this legislation which would establish a two-year pilot program for the preparation of a limited number of “equity impact statements” to accompany proposed legislation to address its impact on race, color, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, age and/or country of ancestral origin. Doing so would not only acknowledge that our governmental systems have sometimes worked, however unintentionally, to discriminate against vulnerable populations, but it would ensure that impactful future legislation has in its initial purview the possible ramifications or benefits to disadvantaged groups.

The bill’s proposed “legislative findings and purpose” summarize the problem well. The legislation represents an important way of centering marginalized communities in working for an ethos in the state that deliberately and carefully avoids further exacerbating the many racial and other inequities that exist in the law. It is a path that nine other states have taken<sup>1</sup> and is made feasible by limiting the number of statements to be prepared each session to no more than twenty bills.

While one could point to many examples of the unintended discriminatory impact of facially neutral policies, one need only consider some of this country’s unfortunate actions in its “war on drugs” campaign. By toughening the criminal penalties for the possession of crack vs. powder cocaine, legislation had a devastating impact on the Black community. Stopping ill-advised policies like that one from becoming law in the first place rather than waiting to fix it years later is a perfect example of the value of legislation like this.

Because this legislation embodies good public policy and would promote more equitable laws, we strongly support its passage.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/racial-impact-statements/>