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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 26-S 2279, AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE – ARREST April 2, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island opposes this legislation, which would “permit non-sworn public safety officers and non-sworn security guards at private colleges and universities to detain individuals within the campus’s jurisdiction when the officer or guard has reasonable grounds to believe that the person has committed a criminal offense.”

The bill requires the guards to be “trained in the proper use of restraint devices” and “abide by locally or nationally recognized use of force policies.” However, we consider that to be less-than-sufficient training for private university security personnel to give them the power to deprive individuals of their liberty, even if for thirty minutes.

It should also be of note that concerns have been raised at many college campuses about discriminatory treatment of students of color by security personnel. The open-ended authority this bill gives guards to detain people based on a “reasonable suspicion” of the commission of any criminal offense, no matter how minor, is therefore also of great concern to us.

Finally, at a time when some private university police departments claim – wrongly, we believe – to not be subject to basic transparency requirements such as the Access to Public Records Act,¹ giving non-sworn officers at those institutions broader police powers is deeply disturbing.

We therefore urge the committee to oppose this legislation. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

¹ See, e.g., https://clerkshq.com/Content/RIAG-ri/decisions/2025/PR25_02.htm