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ACLU OF RHODE ISLAND POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 21-S 421, RELATING TO PROPERTY – IMMIGRATION STATUS March 11, 2021

This bill bars landlords from inquiring about a tenant or prospective tenant's immigration or citizenship status, and further bars municipalities from requiring such inquiries. The ACLU of RI strongly supports this legislation.

The possibility of discrimination against legal immigrants, permanent residents, and even U.S. citizens is greatly increased when landlords have the opportunity to make inquiries like these, which should be none of their business. Such inquiries are essentially a proxy for discriminating against individuals based on their appearance, surname, ethnicity, race or similar inappropriate characteristics.

Unfortunately, we know from agencies that work with immigrant communities that this is a real problem that families encounter in Rhode Island. It is a special burden for mixed families that consist of both documented and undocumented family members. Landlords simply should not be allowed to play the role of immigration agents.

Shelter is a basic necessity of life. Denying people the right to obtain it – or discouraging them from even applying for it – on the basis of irrelevant and discriminatory inquiries should not be allowed. Other states – as diverse as California, Michigan, and North Carolina – have enacted laws protecting immigrants' access to housing, and Rhode Island should do the same.

We urge passage of this bill.