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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 24-H 7451, AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT – CORRECTIONS DEPARTMENT March 5, 2024

The ACLU of Rhode Island is highly supportive of this legislation which would formally codify a medication-assisted treatment program for individuals who are incarcerated. Such a program is not only critical to ensure that incarcerated individuals can readily access needed treatment for substance use disorder, but such programs can further positively impact the health of the incarcerated individual after their sentence.

Individuals involved with the criminal justice system are much more likely to report opioid use, and drug overdoses are one of the leading causes of death for individuals who are released from correctional institutions.¹ This legislation would ensure that incarcerated individuals are being provided care which is considerate of their health while incarcerated and after, and would aim to provide individuals with substance use disorder the tools to make the transition from incarceration to community reintegration smoother.

The Department of Corrections has been a model for other states in its implementation of a MAT program . This legislation, modeled after laws enacted in New York and Vermont, would largely formalize what the DOC is already doing, but provide statutory support for it. This is good public health policy and good criminal justice policy. We strongly urge favorable action on this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/pep19-matbriefcjs_0.pdf