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ACLU OF RI POSITION: AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5076, ARTICLE 3, SECTION 24, RHODE ISLAND INTEGRATED DATA SYSTEMS ACT February 11, 2025

This provision in the Governor’s proposed budget would expand the scope, reach, and use of the Rhode Island Longitudinal Data System, allowing for greater sharing of vast amounts of data among state agencies and external researchers. The ACLU of Rhode Island believes that the state should not be engaged in the expansion of data collection without first better protecting the security of the data, ensuring that any personally identifiable data being collected is necessary, and strengthening the legal rights of residents whose data is compromised.

This section is actually just one of at least three provisions in this budget that seek to greatly expand the state’s gathering and use of data, including personally identifiable data. Article 5, Section 16 creates a financial institution data match system for tax collection purposes, and Article 3, Section 12 establishes a beefed-up internal audit and program integrity unit focused specifically on public assistance that calls for the implementation of “innovative technology and data sharing” designed to “detect, analyze and prevent fraud....”

What is striking – and so concerning – about all three of these sections is that, while focused relentlessly on expanding data collection and sharing among state agencies and others, not one of them contains any language strengthening requirements to safeguard the confidentiality of the collected data, providing greater remedies to individuals when that confidentiality is breached, or strengthening standards to limit the collection and sharing of personally identifiable information on a “need to collect and share” basis.

This one-sided focus is so concerning because, as committee members are well aware, the State has been at the epicenter of at least two incredibly damaging data breaches in the past few years. The first was the data breach at the RI Public Transit Authority that came to light in 2021 and compromised the Social Security numbers and private health care information of thousands of individuals who had no apparent connection to the agency. The second, more recent and even more enormous data breach – involving RIBridges – affected almost half of the state’s population and has only added to the urgency of acting more forcefully to protect sensitive data in the state’s hands. Yet this budget provision, and its two companions, instead call for even more centralization of personal data without attempting in any way to better secure it from malicious third parties or strengthen remedies to victims of state data breaches.

In light of these deficiencies, the ACLU urges the rejection of any budgetary provisions, including this one, that expand the state’s data collection powers without first strengthening the state’s data protection standards as suggested above. Thank you for considering these concerns.