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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 25-S 805, AN ACT RELATING TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY -- THE EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND BUDGET EQUITY IMPACT ACT May 27, 2025

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. The effect has led to long-lasting and deeply rooted discriminatory implications for BIPOC communities in particular.

For this reason, we strongly support this legislation which would provide for the preparation every session of a limited number of “equity impact assessment 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 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 and that is made feasible by limiting the number of statements to be prepared each session to no more than twenty bills.¹

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

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