

ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

**TESTIMONY ON 26-H 7614,
AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION – CERTIFICATION OF TEACHERS
March 17, 2026**

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports this legislation which would pause for two years the requirement that a teacher applicant pass a standardized written exam to qualify for a certificate.

The ACLU has long been concerned about the use of standardized written tests and the way they can serve as unwarranted barriers to occupational licenses. They also often have a racially discriminatory impact that depresses the number of students of color entering important professions. That is certainly the case here. In fact, the General Assembly has some familiarity with the problems associated with standardized testing in the teaching profession.

Over 30 years ago, Rhode Island required aspiring teachers to pass a standardized test known as the National Teachers' Examination (NTE). It had a devastating impact on applicants of color. There was no meaningful evidence that scores on these written tests had any relationship to one's teaching capability, while the statistical evidence was also very clear that these written tests *did* have a disproportionate and adverse impact on students of color. As a result, the General Assembly in 1991 passed a critical law to address this problem by barring the state from denying certification to teachers solely on the basis of their score on that test.

Unfortunately, in 2003, the law was repealed due to federal mandates in the now-extinct No Child Left Behind Act. While the state law was in operation, however, it had a noticeable salutary effect, allowing for the certification of many Black and Latinx teachers who had previously been denied a certificate based on their test scores. It also had a very positive psychological effect in encouraging more students of color to participate in teacher prep programs, since the discriminatory impact of the NTE was well known at the time. It is also worth noting that despite the repeal of that law, a restriction on high-stakes testing for teaching assistants that was enacted around the same time still exists, and does so without untoward effects.¹

In 2022, the General Assembly paused, and then last year repealed, the standardized test mandate for the social work profession, and the results have been extremely positive. In order to continue to promote similar diversity in the teaching profession and not let flawed tests stand in the way of a qualified teaching workforce, the ACLU urges the committee to pass this moratorium bill. Thank you for considering our views.

¹ The successor to the NTE in Rhode Island, the Praxis exam, has similarly demonstrated wide disparities in the passing rates of white test-takers and BIPOC test-takers. Diversify the Education Workforce: Change Teacher Certification, <https://www.aft.org/news/diversify-education-workforce-change-teacher-certification>. Thus, passage of this legislation remains as relevant as it did in the 1990s.