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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 7931 and 26-H 7932, ACTS RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY – LICENSING OF HEALTHCARE FACILITIES March 19, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports both H-7931 and H-7932, which seek to preserve and strengthen access to language and communications services in healthcare settings, ensuring that individuals can properly understand and consent to their medical care.

H-7931 requires hospitals and emergency-care facilities to provide a certified, rather than qualified, interpreter for every non-English speaker, except for languages where certification is unavailable, and qualified interpreters may then be utilized. Providing patients with access to accurately translated medical terminology limits the risk of miscommunication during diagnosis and treatment and ensures that informed consent is truly informed.

While this legislation still permits an individual to utilize the translation services of their family or friends, this change means that they do not have to rely on that assistance and can further retain their medical privacy if they so choose. This legislation would also require that the healthcare facility provide written translations of vital documents, depending on size of the Limited English Proficiency population. This is vital to ensure that individuals can review and understand these documents in their own language.

H-7932 prohibits healthcare facilities from reducing their American Sign Language interpreter services absent approval from the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. For similar reasons, this legislation is important to maintain individuals' access to interpretation services so they can fully understand and consent to their medical treatment. For these reasons, we support both bills.

Thank you for considering our views.