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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 8274, RELATING TO RHODE ISLAND FAIR HOUSING PRACTICES ACT March 18, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports this bill, which corrects a more-than-decade-old error by addressing the scope of the state's Fair Housing Practices Act (FHPA).

In 2012, the General Assembly enacted legislation declaring that discrimination on the basis of "housing status," like discrimination on the basis of race, sex, etc., was a violation of FHPA. In doing so, however, the legislation inadvertently neglected to add that term to the other provisions of the statute giving the state human rights commission the authority to investigate claims of discrimination on that basis.

In short, the law as currently written declares this class of vulnerable individuals as being protected from discrimination, but then mistakenly fails to provide any remedies to address that discrimination. Passing this bill will right that obvious wrong.

Separately, the bill would also delete obsolete and unconstitutional language barring complainants from publicly discussing discrimination complaints that they have filed with the commission. A federal court decision struck down this provision as a violation of the First Amendment over two decades ago. Language in this bill would appropriately – and finally – revise the statute to comport with that decision.

We therefore urge the committee's support of these modest but important clarifications to the state's fair housing law. Thank you for your consideration of our views.