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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

COMMENTS ON 26-H 7128, RELATING TO EDUCATION – MAINTENANCE OF ORDER ON CAMPUS March 24, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island opposes this legislation, which would arm campus police officers in the state's public colleges and universities, regardless of the decisions made by the leadership of each collegiate institution.

Under current law, these institutions are able to set their own policy for arming their officers. Currently, the University of Rhode Island has taken advantage of this and arms its campus police. Both the Community College of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College have, to this point, decided that arming their campus police is not in the best interest of their respective campuses. For the reasons expressed below, the ACLU believes that no campus police should be armed, but that at a minimum, it is not a decision that should be mandated by the General Assembly to impose such a requirement on these institutions.

There is a tremendous danger inherent in introducing guns to college campuses. While there is always a hypothetical situation in which campus law enforcement officers could benefit from being armed, it is a certainty that introducing weapons to college campuses brings with it the very real danger of accidental discharges and tragic cases of misunderstandings and misidentifications.¹ This should be carefully considered before any action regarding bringing guns to campus is undertaken. Indeed, each institution has done precisely that and reached their respective conclusions on the matter.

While the legislation requires these officers to undergo certain levels of training, it appears to fall short of the training required for municipal police departments. At the same time, the bill would provide campus police officers with all of the procedural and substantive protections of the formerly named Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBOR). We believe that law still makes it too difficult for police departments to discipline officers who have engaged in misconduct, even with the minimal reforms adopted two years ago. Now is not the time to be expanding LEOBOR's privileges to even more individuals.

For all these reasons, we believe that requiring the state's institutions of higher education to have armed officers should be rejected. Thank you for considering our views.

¹ As committee members are aware, the presence of armed police officers on the Brown University campus did not prevent the tragic shooting that occurred there in December.