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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 26-S 2751, RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES – RHODE ISLAND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ACT April 15, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island opposes this legislation which would authorize cities and towns to use automated road safety monitoring systems to enforce stop sign, crosswalk, and pedestrian right-of-way violations in designated safety zones.

While we share the goal of improving pedestrian safety, we have consistently advocated against the use of automated camera systems to determine driving violations. Generally, a key purpose of traffic enforcement is to address unsafe driving as it occurs. Sending a notice or citation days or even weeks after a driver has already successfully committed the driving violation in the safety zone negates this immediate benefit and does not prevent harm in the moment. Instead, its greatest benefit is to serve as a revenue raiser for the municipality.

The use of cameras instead of officers on the roads also negates the opportunity for an officer to make a judgment call and exercise discretion as to the driver's actions. The proposed legislation does contain exceptions for liability under this chapter, but they fail to capture many possible situations that could result in a violation. Specifically, the legislation only includes scenarios where the violation was necessary to allow passage of an emergency vehicle or comply with other laws, or while participating in a funeral procession, or if the violation occurred after the vehicle had been reported stolen. Limiting an officer's discretion by relying solely on automated photographs fails to account for other scenarios, for example where a driver may have driven in a way to avoid an accident, or if the driver experiences a medical emergency.

As a society, we are becoming much too inured to an environment where we are constantly being monitored. Rhode Island has speed cameras, red light cameras, and automated license plate readers monitoring and following us. Each past use becomes a justification for expanding surveillance in other contexts and for other purposes. Instead, we believe it is time to acknowledge that too much of this surveillance is already happening so that any expansions of this invasive technology should be viewed with an extremely skeptical eye and rejected.

Thank you for considering our views.