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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 26-S 2943, RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES – MOTOR VEHICLE OFFENSES April 9, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this legislation which would both repeal the forfeiture provision for a first offense of eluding law enforcement in a high-speed pursuit and would require that a forfeiture of a motor vehicle for a second or subsequent offense be allowed only after conviction.

Permitting forfeiture of a vehicle following a first offense is an overly harsh penalty. Civil forfeiture is a drastic measure that acts to deprive individuals of access to their property, and in this instance a very important and potentially expensive piece of property. Imposing such a consequence for a first offense closes the door to the potential for an individual undermines the principle of proportionality of punishment.

Equally as important, this legislation also only permits forfeiture after conviction of the second or subsequent offense. This is an important change because it prevents individuals from losing access to their motor vehicle without being formally found guilty of the offense and based only on allegations.

Ultimately, this legislation considers the real impact that limited access to a vehicle can have on individuals and families. A vehicle can act as a lifeline for individuals to get to work, bring their kids to school, or to care for their families. The loss of a vehicle can therefore cause other consequences, like job loss or other financial issues, which then leads to hardships for the entire family.

For all these reasons, the ACLU supports this legislation. Thank you for considering our views.