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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 7437, AN ACT RELATING TO COURTS AND CIVIL PROCEDURE – COURTS – STATE AND MUNICIPAL COURT CONTRACT April 28, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island has long expressed opposition to the needless proliferation of surveillance technologies – particularly camera technologies – both generally and, more particularly, as a method of addressing the enforcement of traffic statutes. As a result, we are opposed to this legislation which would renew the “Don’t Block the Box” statute, which reauthorizes the allowable use of this traffic violation detection system.

Our organization has noted for years the inefficiency of surveillance systems at curbing the problems they are purportedly designed to address. Traffic violation systems by their nature cannot cure any problems with a driver in the moment, and any violations found by their use are unfairly presumed to be by the owner of the car rather than the actual driver of the vehicle. They also create an unofficial record of the whereabouts of drivers and store data on vehicle location for indeterminate amounts of time. Because of this, the net effect of these systems is to normalize the issue of “surveillance creep” rather than comprehensively address the problems they are designed to attempt to fix. The presence of red-light cameras, speed cameras, license plate readers, and block the box cameras cannot be seen any other way. Ultimately, use of this technology is more about the surveillance state and raising revenue, not promoting traffic safety.

Issues of traffic in Rhode Island will not be solved by pointing cameras, and the collateral consequences of camera use show that they are not a long-term solution for any chronic traffic concerns. For these reasons, we urge that the expansion proposed by this bill be rejected. Thank you for your consideration.