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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 26-S 2972, RELATING TO RESIDENTIAL TENANT'S RIGHT TO LEGAL REPRESENTATION ACT April 28, 2026

Especially in the past few years, the acute need for healthy, equitable, safe, and accessible housing and robust tenant protections has become abundantly clear. For this reason, the ACLU of Rhode Island is in support of this bill, which provides for the services of legal counsel to individuals who are engaged in an eviction matter and unable to afford an attorney to represent them.

Especially for indigent tenants who may be facing adverse housing actions, asking such individuals to navigate a complex court system without adequate legal support and effective resources only engenders circumstances where the deck is stacked against them from the outset. Allowing access to legal assistance will often be the difference between maintaining housing for a family or homelessness. The evidence is indisputable that clients with attorneys are much more likely to prevail in eviction proceedings than those who proceed *pro se*.

Everybody is aware that housing in Rhode Island is in a dire situation, and the importance of stable and affordable housing is indisputable. Ensuring that clients in the most need of legal counsel will be provided it at such a crucial moment provides an important due process protection and increases equity in a complicated and stressful system. We therefore urge support for this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.