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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT/AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 26-S 2991, RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT – THE BODY CAMERAS FOR CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES ACT – THE WILLIE WASHINGTON, JR. ACT May 12, 2026

This legislation would require the Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI) correctional staff to wear and use body-worn cameras (BWC) for recording certain interactions with the incarcerated population, such as use of force incidents and disciplinary proceedings. Because, as with police body cameras, we believe BWCs can promote accountability in the correctional setting and serve as a useful oversight tool both for correctional officers and for those who are incarcerated, we consider the deployment of these cameras to be a positive step.

However, we do wish to suggest a few amendments. Absent the right protections – including assurances as to when the cameras may be turned on and off – use of the devices can be very problematic in the confined setting of a prison where a person cannot avoid being recorded. The bill references the importance of “maintaining the dignity and privacy of incarcerated individuals,” but does not explicitly set standards to ensure that the activation of body cameras is not misused by correctional officers to undermine that goal. We recognize that the legislation appropriately requires the adoption of formal regulations to address issues like this one, and we would therefore urge amendments to the legislation to deal with this gap in privacy protection.

Additionally, the bill would allow prisoners to view recordings that directly involve them – but only under “appropriate” circumstances. It would be helpful to expand on the meaning of this term so that individuals are not arbitrarily denied access to recordings involving their own interactions with guards.

Finally, we note that the bill provides for “potential civil liabilities” against correctional officers who violate the statute. However, no specifics are provided about what these liabilities might be or how they can be pursued. Here again we would urge that more details be provided so that people who are affected by violations of the statute have clear legal remedies delineated.¹

More broadly, however, we strongly support this legislative effort and urge the adoption of a program providing for the use of body cameras during correctional officer interactions with incarcerated persons at the ACI. Thank you for considering our views.

¹ One additional minor amendment we would suggest is to Section 42-56.4-3(a), which states that “all correctional staff assigned to direct supervision roles shall wear body cameras while on duty within the facilities.” It might be helpful to clarify that this refers to those with supervisory roles *over incarcerated individuals*.