

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 19-H 5553
HOUSE RESOLUTION CREATING A SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY AND PROVIDE
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENCOURAGING MORE PERSONS OF COLOR TO ENTER THE FIELD OF
EDUCATION
May 1, 2019**

The ACLU is highly supportive of H 5553, which would create a special legislative commission to examine ways in which Rhode Island can encourage higher diversity in the educational work force.

Studies have well-documented the connection between teachers of color and higher achievement in minority student populations. According to data provided by RIDE, 42% of students enrolled in the Rhode Island public school system during the 2017-2018 school year were students of color. 87% of educators in our public schools are white.

We would like to comment on one specific element of disparity that we hope will continue to be addressed in the work of the commission. For years, the ACLU has fought against the implementation of standardized testing as a component of procuring a teaching certificate, primarily because these standardized tests have considerable achievement gaps between white candidates and minority candidates. These achievement gaps result, at least in part, from the often-acknowledged discriminatory outcomes from the use of standardized testing mechanisms.

Educational Testing Services (ETS), the company which administers Praxis, the teacher certification testing used in the state of Rhode Island, released an analysis of disparities between white and minority Praxis testers. In just one example, the difference in percentage between white test-takers and African-American test-takers who passed a mathematics Praxis exam was 41.5%. This particular data point is not a sole outlier; every single test type revealed a wide disparity in passing between white and minority teaching candidates who took Praxis.

As this commission moves forward, we would like to encourage members to evaluate our current process for certifying teachers in Rhode Island and how it lends itself to a lack of racial diversity among our educators. Until the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, Rhode Island law explicitly barred teacher applicants from being disqualified from teacher certification based solely on their performance on a standardized teaching test. In order to best serve people of color in our communities and our schools, the ACLU believes that the reinstatement of this prior restriction on the use of standardized testing should be critically examined as an effective approach to increasing the number of teachers of color in our schools.

Thank you for your consideration.