

ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

**TESTIMONY ON 21 – H 5079,
AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION –
FUNDRAISING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

February 24, 2021

The ACLU of RI is appreciative of the opportunity to testify in support of this piece of legislation. As this committee is aware, legislation to address funding for public school field trips arose as a response to an important and positive decision made by the former RI Commissioner of Education which expressed that parents or guardians could not and cannot be required to pay fees for their students' education, including school-sponsored field trips, and that such activities must be made available to all students. This decision was strongly supported by our organization as it validated and cemented the role of equity in student participation in school extracurricular and enrichment activities.

As such, it has been our position that any legislation to address crowdsourcing or otherwise seeking to obtain funding for such school activities must contain clear and explicit language which clarifies the exclusively voluntary nature of such donations. This legislation appropriately does so, and it further critically ensures that while schools *can* accept donations or funding from parents or guardians on a voluntary basis, no student will be excluded from such activity due to a lack of personal funding.

We appreciate the careful attention that the Chair has paid to this issue and the thoughtfulness with which this issue has been approached. H 5079 favorably addresses both the need for funding that schools require and, most importantly, guarantees both that no parent or guardian will feel compelled to give money that they cannot afford and that no student will be denied the opportunity to participate in such activities solely because of their family's income.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by: Hannah Stern, Policy Associate