ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

**TESTIMONY ON 23 – H 5503,
AN ACT RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES – OPERATORS' AND
CHAUFFEURS' LICENSES
March 21, 2023**

Though we applaud the intentions behind it, this bill – which would require the DMV, the Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association, and an "organization that advocates for persons with autism spectrum disorder" to design a special driver's license for people with this condition that would be marked "autism" and a similarly labeled motor vehicle decal – is also an example of a piece of legislation whose practical impact may not necessarily align with its impetus. Because we are concerned that this legislation could lead to stigmatization for individuals with autism, and because we believe that the resources this bill would require would be better allocated to mandating police training such that all individuals with disabilities may receive the dignity they deserve when they are experiencing a police interaction, we urge rejection of this bill.

It should be the goal that police approach every interaction with the same amount of compassion and dignity, regardless of whether an individual has chosen to visually alert law enforcement that they are an individual with a specific disability. Instead, we are concerned that this bill would place a burden on the individual with the disability to display visually not only to law enforcement, but to all community members, their medical information, all with the hope of it ensuring that they will not have a negative law enforcement interaction. But we believe that the police should be prepared from the outset of an interaction to be sensitive to the multitude of unique needs and behaviors every person – disabled or not – may exhibit.

Should the committee be interested in providing increased protections to individuals with disabilities in the course of police interactions, we urge support of legislation which would require robust training for police on identifying and responding to a number of developmental and other disabilities. This, we believe, is the most comprehensive way to ensure safety for both the civilian and the law enforcement personnel alike, and does not force individuals to publicly disclose their personal medical information to do so.

For these reasons, and though we are sensitive to the motivation behind this bill, we urge rejection of this legislation. Thank you in advance for your consideration.