ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

**TESTIMONY ON 23 – H 5534,
AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS –
PROFESSIONAL OR OCCUPATIONAL LICENSE
March 21, 2023**

Especially because the past few years have highlighted the importance of stable employment, we are supportive of the measures that the Rhode Island General Assembly has taken – and has proposed – to expand access to professional and occupational licenses for more individuals in our state. As such, we strongly support this bill, which would not require proof of lawful presence in the United States to obtain one of these licenses.

At least ten other states – recognizing the economic benefits of all residents having increased income and providing tax revenue to the state, and seeking to both address labor shortages and ensure that trained immigrant residents are able to exercise their skillset – have passed similar legislation which allows for certain populations of immigrants to more readily enter the workforce. Especially because this legislation would statutorily ensure that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients may easily enter into a career for which they may have been educated and trained for in-state, this legislation is a practical and important policy to put in place.

Three years ago, the General Assembly passed legislation which ensured that trained and qualified individuals, who had criminal records but were eminently qualified for their jobs, would not be unduly precluded from obtaining professional and occupational licenses solely on the basis of an unrelated or outdated criminal record. This legislation would do the same in the context of immigration status. Over the years, the legislature has taken important steps to help and protect DACA recipients to attend our state's universities and obtain drivers' licenses; we believe this bill is a logical next step in welcoming their presence and the contributions they can make to the state.

For these reasons, we strongly support this legislation. Thank you for your consideration of our views.