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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 23-H 5889, RELATING TO COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONSHIP ACT OF 2015 April 4, 2023

Passage of the Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act in 2015 was an important step in the state's ongoing efforts to address the severe and persistent problem of racial profiling. A component of that law required all police departments in the state to record detailed information about traffic stops and searches they conducted, and further required the issuance of annual reports analyzing that data for racial disparities. However, these requirements expired three years ago. This bill would reinstate that obligation and, just as importantly, it would ensure that the analysis of the data is presented to the public in a useful way and that police departments respond to the findings of any racial disparities in a meaningful fashion as well.

Past years of data collection have made clear to the ACLU – and to other organizations that have worked to address racial profiling since the first traffic stop data collection law was enacted two decades ago – that the mere collection of data and compilation of statistics are insufficient by themselves. If data collection is to be reinstated, it is also essential that (1) there be stronger requirements in place to guide police departments' response to documented racial disparities and (2) the data is reported in a way that provides greater transparency and fulfills the goal that the data collection is designed to serve. Unfortunately, because that has not been the case, this bill seeks to favorably address these gaps.

Though the data collected in conjunction with the CCPRA has been done with the intent of providing greater transparency to the public, the presentation of the data has made its independent review and examination difficult for community groups and individuals alike. The details of the problems are rather technical, but suffice it to say that the tweaks provided in the bill regarding the presentation of the collected data will go a long way to promoting the transparency and oversight that are main goals of the data collection. Similarly, this legislation contains more robust requirements for police to respond to data that show significant racial disparities in a department's stop or search practices. What we have found over the years is that some departments simply did not meaningfully address disparities uncovered in the annual reports that the current statute required them to prepare.

Collecting data for the sake of collecting data only goes so far. The ACLU hopes that the data collection requirements of the CCPRA will be reinstated, but only if these additional provisions contained in this bill, promoting greater transparency and accountability, are included. We urge the committee to act favorably on the bill's passage, which, it should be noted, is the product of a great deal of compromise by the community groups supporting it.