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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT/AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 23-H 6181, RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE – REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS April 4, 2023

Despite the enormous implications for public safety, social justice, and institutional accountability, Rhode Island remains one of only two states in the country without a state-level certification or decertification system for police officers. In the past few years alone, neighboring Massachusetts, along with California and New Jersey, officially codified a decertification process for their law enforcement agencies, leaving Rhode Island and Hawaii as the outliers.

The ongoing public upswell of support for more meaningful scrutiny of the qualifications of law enforcement personnel indicates that it is finally time for Rhode Island to follow the lead of all these other states and institute a similar decertification requirement to assist with oversight of our policing institutions.

As public-facing personnel who carry lethal weapons and have the capacity to seriously injure or kill the people they serve, police officers and the training they are given and the qualifications they are subject to have a profound effect on the surrounding community environment. While we understand that this bill needs to be modified in order to accomplish its stated goal, we fully support its intent to ensure that the disciplinary results of police officer misconduct are treated the same way as those of every other government employee and of occupational guidelines which hundreds of other jobs, including barbers, childcare professionals, and more, are currently subject to.

Police officers who have been fired for serious misconduct on the job or who have been convicted of serious crimes that affect their qualifications for carrying a weapon as part of their duties should not be able to simply head over to another police department for employment with their history of misconduct hidden from view. We therefore strongly support legislation which will eliminate this scenario and bring Rhode Island's law enforcement practices in line with 48 other states, and urge the committee's support of a Sub A of this bill which will accomplish that goal.

Thank you for considering our views.