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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 22-H 7308, RELATING TO DISORDERLY CONDUCT February 17, 2022

This bill would make it a crime to threaten to commit an act of mass violence at various activities and institutions. We believe this provision is unnecessary and overbroad, and should be rejected.

The bill is unnecessary because making such threats is already a crime, and thus can only serve to promote prosecutorial over-charging. It is overly broad because it defines mass violence to include threats that would lead to undefined “emotional injury.”

Even if the bill were more carefully delineated and not redundant, the individuals who are most likely to be caught up in this admittedly inappropriate conduct – but without any real intent to follow through – are immature students. Having represented students over the years who, in an overly-sensitive post-Columbine environment, have been disciplined for such things as writing alleged “threats” in English class compositions, the ACLU knows the real harm that this legislation could cause to innocent students.

The ACLU urges the committee’s opposition to this bill.