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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 24-H 7967, AN ACT RELATING TO PROPERTY -- HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS March 27, 2024

The ACLU of RI strongly supports this legislation, which would update and strengthen Rhode Island's first-in-the-nation Homeless Bill of Rights. The proposed revisions are based on the history of the law's implementation that those it was designed to protect have witnessed firsthand. Those revisions include the following important improvements in the law:

- Because individuals consistently have complained about law enforcement officials entering their temporary shelters without permission, the bill would make abundantly clear that, as with any other residence, police have no right to enter encampment tents without a warrant.
- Before shutting down encampments, police would be required to provide sufficient advance notice for those who are living there to vacate and ensure that reasonable alternatives for relocation are available.
- The bill would also strengthen the remedies available for violations of this critical law by authorizing fines for intentional violations of the statute, and by allowing third-party organizations to sue on behalf of the homeless whose rights are violated, since, especially in light of their transient status, they are often not in a position to do so on their own.

Just as Rhode Island took the lead over a decade ago in recognizing the dignity and civil rights of those who are unhoused by enacting the Homeless Bill of Rights, we urge the committee to show its continued commitment to this issue by strengthening that law as this bill seeks to do.

Thank you for considering our views.