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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 22-S 2635, AN ACT RELATING TO ELECTIONS – MAIL BALLOTS – VOTING April 28, 2022

The ACLU of Rhode Island strongly supports the goal of this legislation, which is designed to promote the ability of individuals in prison to vote if they are eligible to do so.

A large percentage of the ACI population is eligible to vote. Under our state Constitution, anybody who is either incarcerated at the ACI for a misdemeanor or as a pre-trial detainee retains the right to vote. Yet few end up exercising that right, either due to lack of knowledge or because of the difficulties encountered in trying to vote from inside a prison.

In order to address this problem, this bill would commendably require the posting of information about voting rights in the prison facilities, and also provide for the appointment of a “jail voting coordinator” to assist individuals there in exercising this critical right.

In short, the right to the franchise is a fundamental right. Its exercise should be encouraged, and it is particularly useful to do so to give incarcerated individuals more of a stake and a say in the democratic system; the tenure of all these individuals in the prison is, after all, of relatively short duration.

We therefore strongly support efforts like S-2635 that will promote this important right.