

**ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT**

**TESTIMONY ON 23-S 409,  
AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT –  
PROHIBITION ON THE USE OF POLICE ROBOT TECHNOLOGY  
February 28, 2023**

As technology rapidly advances, it is critical that legislative efforts proactively and meaningfully restrict technological practices which could pose serious harm to residents and communities. It is for this reason that the ACLU of Rhode Island supports this legislation, which would generally prohibit the utilization of robots by law enforcement officers.

Our organization has long expressed concerns about the degree to which fairly unregulated technological advancements are used for police purposes with limited public transparency. This legislation appropriately addresses this issue from the outset by eliminating the ability for this potentially very harmful technology to be utilized in Rhode Island. Such concerns about imminent testing of such technologies are not theoretical; both New York City and Boston police have recently tested or experimented with the use of robot “police dogs” to considerable public outcry and significant and valid feedback about the ways that such technology may only exacerbate existing disparities in enforcement practices.

In many instances, especially over the past decade, the rate at which technology has grown has rapidly outpaced our policies and legislative responses. Preemptively addressing the threat that newer technologies can have on communities – especially those that are already over-policed, such as BIPOC communities – is critical to ensure that any future deployment of these technologies is not done in a discriminatory manner. This bill effectively addresses this issue by barring, with specified exemptions, the use or testing of certain technologies in the first place.

In the interest of ensuring that the full intent of this bill is captured in its language, we only urge two small amendments to this legislation. They are to add the phrase “use or” in front of the word “authorize” on page 2, line 3 and page 2, line 8. We believe these minor amendments will serve to reflect the objective of the bill with greater clarity.

Especially with the national upswell of support for significant reform to our policing practices, it is simply a matter of proactive and pragmatic policy to enact legislation like this. As such, we support its passage.

Thank you for your consideration.