

ACLU OF RI POSITION: AMEND

**TESTIMONY ON 23-S 488,
AN ACT RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES
FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
April 19, 2023**

The ACLU of RI applauds this bill's goal of encouraging alternative pathways for teacher certification and for waiving certain fees for certification, including those for taking the Praxis exam. While all of these efforts are important steps, we additionally urge that, in providing alternatives to meeting certification requirements, the bill include the opportunity for a pathway that does not require a passing score on a standardized teacher test like Praxis.

Studies have well-documented the connection between teachers of color and higher achievement in BIPOC student populations. Unfortunately, according to data provided by RIDE, 45% of students enrolled in the Rhode Island public school system as of October 2019 were BIPOC students while 89% of the educators were white.

For years, the ACLU fought against the implementation of standardized testing as a component of procuring a teaching certificate, primarily because these standardized tests show considerable achievement gaps between white candidates and minority candidates and because there is no compelling evidence that these tests truly measure an applicant's capabilities as a teacher.

An analysis of the disparities between white test-takers and BIPOC test-takers exhibits racial discrepancies worthy of examination, especially for Praxis, the teacher certification test administered in Rhode Island. Nationwide, 92% of white test-takers passed the Praxis reading test compared to a 68% pass rate for Black test-takers. This particular data point is not a sole outlier; consistently, Praxis tests reveal a wide disparity in pass rates between white and BIPOC teaching candidates.¹

Until the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, Rhode Island law explicitly barred teacher applicants from being disqualified from teacher certification based solely on their performance on a standardized teaching test. In order to best serve BIPOC individuals in our communities and our schools, the ACLU believes that the reinstatement of this prior restriction on

¹ Diversify the Education Workforce: Change Teacher Certification, <https://www.aft.org/news/diversify-education-workforce-change-teacher-certification>

the use of standardized testing should be adopted as an effective approach to increasing the number of qualified teachers of color in our schools. Relying on the results of a standardized teacher test to deny an applicant certification does not increase the quality of the teaching pool, but greatly harms equality, and is a true barrier to reform.

It is worth noting that, in recognition of a very similar and serious recruitment problem in the field of social work, the General Assembly last year enacted a law that imposed a three-year moratorium on requiring social worker applicants to pass a standardized test in order to qualify for a license. We firmly believe a similar legislative response to the shortage of teachers of color is in order.

In conclusion, we hope that any proposals put forward in modifying this legislation address and delay, if not end, the use of standardized teacher testing in certifying teachers in Rhode Island in light of the insidious way it lends itself to a lack of racial diversity among our educators.

Thank you for your consideration.