



128 DORRANCE STREET, SUITE 400
PROVIDENCE, RI 02903
401.831.7171 (t)
401.831.7175 (f)
www.riaclu.org | info@riaclu.org

**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO 18-H 7055 –
TAX CREDITS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCHOLARSHIP ORGANIZATIONS
May 8, 2018**

The ACLU opposes this legislation, which would more than triple, from \$1.5 million to \$5 million, the tax credit program for businesses that make donations to “scholarship organizations” that funnel money to private and parochial schools for tuition purposes. At a time when public schools’ budgets across the state continue to face hardships, it is simply unacceptable to be expanding the aid the state provides to private schools, even if done indirectly through a tax credit.

For many years, supporters of this program have argued that low and middle- income parents need alternatives to poorly performing public schools. The solution to failing public schools, however, is not to use tax dollars to divert select students to private schools. Doing so undermines the premise of a public school system that serves all, with the support of all, and undermines efforts to address the financial difficulties that the public schools face. The substantial additional allocation for these credits proposed by this legislation would be much better spent to improve the public schools instead of further depriving them.

A few specific points on the actual implementation of the program are worth noting. First, over the many years of the program, a significant amount of the tax credits have gone to *just two* schools – the Jewish Community Day School and the Providence Hebrew Day School. In 2017, for example, these two schools received \$750,000 in funds. Second, largely as a result of this, more students benefitting from this aid program come from Zip Code 02906 than any other zip code in the state. (82 of the 95 students benefitting from the scholarships from these two schools were from 02906.) We recognize that the aid only goes to families meeting specific income eligibility requirements, but a statistic like this remains quite striking when considering the actual impact of this tax credit program and its benefits.

We therefore respectfully urge the Committee to reject this bill. If anything, we believe the scope of the program should be reduced, not expanded.