

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 20 – H 7292
AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION –
CERTIFICATION OF TEACHERS
March 11, 2020**

The ACLU is very supportive of H 7292, which would instruct the Commissioner of Education to develop strategies with the intent of bolstering the retention and recruitment of minority teachers and administrators in Rhode Island public schools.

The importance of this legislation is profound – studies have well-documented the connection between teachers of color and higher academic achievement in minority student populations. Yet, according to a 2018 report provided by RIDE, in Providence alone, 91% of students were students of color while 77% of the teaching forces were white.

We appreciate the inclusion of a specific mortgage assistance program for certified teachers as a concrete step towards boosting teacher retention; however, in a bill which is clear in its intent to thoughtfully implement resources to recruit minority teachers, we believe an additional provision addressing standardized testing practices as a component of securing a teaching certificate would be appropriate. For years, the ACLU has fought against this practice because standardized tests have considerable achievement gaps between white candidates and minority candidates. These achievement gaps result, at least in part, from the often-acknowledged discriminatory outcomes from the use of standardized testing mechanisms.

Educational Testing Services (ETS), the company which administers the Praxis – the teacher certification test used in Rhode Island – released an analysis of these disparities between white and minority Praxis testers. In just one example, the difference in percentage between white test-takers and African American test-takers who passed a mathematics Praxis exam was 41.5%. This data point is not an outlier; *every single test type* revealed a wide disparity in passing rates between white and minority teaching candidates to sat for Praxis.

Until the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, Rhode Island law explicitly barred teacher applicants from being disqualified from certification based solely on their performance on a standardized teaching test. In order to best promote the recruitment and retention of minority teacher candidates, we encourage the Committee to include a provision requiring the reinstatement this prior restriction on standardized testing.

Thank you for your consideration.