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**TESTIMONY ON 20 – H 7447**  
**AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS –**  
**GENETIC COUNSELORS LICENSING ACT**  
**March 3, 2020**

The ACLU of Rhode Island appreciates the opportunity to provide commentary on H 7447, which regulates the licensing of genetic counselors. While we have no position on the overall goal of this legislation, we would like to raise specific concerns regarding the grounds for denial of a license to practice genetic counselling. In particular, the bill sets forth an expansive list of criminal charges to serve as the grounds for denial of a license, and there is no appeal process specified in the legislation for an appeal of a license denial on the basis of their criminal background.

Along with a number of other advocacy groups, the ACLU is concerned about the barriers that broad-based criminal record check requirements can have on an individual's ability to obtain an occupational license in Rhode Island. All too often, an individual's past criminal record, even if in the distant past and unrelated to the license being sought, can inappropriately prevent them from entering an employment field for which they may be wholly qualified.

In that regard, this legislation allows for a denial of a license for genetic counseling if the applicant has been convicted of a wide range of offenses as listed in § 23-17-37, including disparate convictions such as felony drug offenses or felony banking law violations, no matter how long ago the offense was committed. Under this bill, an individual could be barred from obtaining a counseling license for a twenty-year-old felony drug possession charge, regardless of their subsequent rehabilitation or professional experience. The lack of a specified appeal process only exacerbates the harm to individuals with past records who seek to obtain this type of license.

Access to reliable, consistent, and meaningful work is a critical component of community reintegration and rehabilitation for those who are justice involved. Rather than perpetuate a pattern of discrimination against ex-offenders, we urge the Committee to impose specific and strict limitations on the use of criminal records which may otherwise be used to unjustly prevent an individual from entering a field for which they be eminently qualified.