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**COMMENTS IN OPPOSITION TO H 7724 AND H 7725,
ACTS RELATING TO HEALTH & SAFETY
April 25, 2018**

The ACLU of Rhode Island recognizes the serious nature of the opioid epidemic and appreciates this body's attempts to pursue solutions. However, this particular attempt not only falls short of being effective, but also has the potential to cause more damage than it solves.

House bill 7724 allows a person to be involuntarily committed for drug intoxication by court petition. This is medically dangerous, as coerced detoxification can greatly increase the risk of a fatal overdose in an opiate user. Someone who relapses after a detox will likely try to pick up where they left off in terms of amount or dose of drugs. Since the body's tolerance will have decreased significantly, such users are at a very high risk of overdose. For this reason, research done in Massachusetts found that people who undergo involuntary treatment are twice as likely to die as people who undergo treatment voluntarily. So potentially, establishing involuntary commitment can be worse than doing nothing at all.

The bill also has the potential of undermining the state's Good Samaritan Act, making individuals think twice about calling for help in an emergency, knowing that it could lead to the involuntary commitment of a friend or loved one.

For over four decades, America has been trying to coerce its way to decreased substance abuse and addiction. In recent years, Rhode Island policymakers have recognized the folly of this approach, and have focused on treatment and prevention initiatives and other non-punitive measures. Now is not the time to backtrack on this approach and waste already scarce resources for rehabilitation into dangerous forced treatment.

We urge the Committee to carefully consider the potential ramifications of this legislation and to reject it, and to instead continue to address this very serious problem in more appropriate ways. Thank you.