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TESTIMONY ON 19-H 6067

**AN ACT RELATING TO FOOD AND DRUGS – THE EDWARD O. HAWKINS AND THOMAS C. SLATER
MEDICAL MARIJUANA ACT – THE RHODE ISLAND CANNABIS EQUITY ACT OF 2019**

The ACLU is highly supportive of this bill, which would require studies to determine whether racial disparities exist in the process to obtain a state license to sell marijuana and whether they exist in arrest and conviction rates relating to marijuana. Having noted this particular disparity in the past and its significant impact on Rhode Islanders, we believe it would be beneficial to have a statutorily mandated process as a part of the process of addressing this inequity.

According to an ACLU report from 2016, Rhode Islanders who are black are three times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession as white Rhode Islanders. Given that the report also indicated a low overall rate of arrest for marijuana possession in Rhode Island, this racial disparity is especially troubling and striking. We appreciate that this legislation also necessitates examination of the disparities in obtaining a license to sell legal marijuana, as a major concern for the ACLU has been the ability that anyone convicted of a crime related to marijuana possession would have to procure one of these licenses.

As Rhode Island moves closer to legalizing marijuana, it is critical to consider the substantial impact on those who were most affected by its criminalization. By legally requiring a closer examination of racial disparities in the policing of marijuana and the legal sale of marijuana, our legislature can take deliberate and decisive steps towards equity.

Thank you for your consideration, and we urge the committee to pass this legislation.