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**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO 15 S-132, RELATING TO PAROLE  
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The ACLU of Rhode Island opposes this bill, which would increase the amount of time that inmates convicted of murder would be required to serve before being eligible for parole.

We believe that current law, along with Rhode Island Parole Board standards, provides more appropriate discretion to consider the individual circumstances of each case. Meaningful discretion in considering a person's eligibility for parole serves an extremely important safety-valve function. Presently, an individual is required to serve a minimum 20 years of a sentence. If a person is convicted of murder at age 45, is the public necessarily being protected by forcing him or her to be incarcerated until the age of 75 if all other circumstances suggest that parole is appropriate? Conversely, an 18-year-old youth who compulsively commits a heinous crime certainly deserves appropriate punishment, but if he is given a 75-year sentence, will justice always be served by keeping him incarcerated after they are 55 years old? By preventing the Parole Board from being able to consider individual circumstances after a substantial amount of time has already passed before their release can be considered, this bill undermines both that agency's crucial role in the criminal justice system and the rehabilitative goals of prison. (As these examples show, the bill could also lead to situations where a person sentenced to life could be eligible for parole sooner than a person given a long, but non-life, sentence.) The bottom line is: just because a person is eligible for parole after 20 years does not in any way mean they will get parole.

This legislation also comes at a high financial cost to the state. With the cost of incarceration estimated at approximately \$40,000 an inmate per year, keeping a handful of offenders locked up for an extra ten or more years, based on this mandate, will cost taxpayers a substantial amount of money that could be much better spent by the state. The costs associated with increased prison sentences should be given the same scrutiny as any other legislation that has fiscal consequences for the state – whether it involves public education, assistance to low-income families, or expansion of social services. Unfortunately, sentencing bills like these are too often given a free ride despite their consequential fiscal costs. There is no compelling reason for such a discrepancy, and the committee should be considering the fiscal consequences before taking any action on legislation like this.

Because this legislation amounts to an unnecessary and costly interference with the parole system and the criminal justice system's interest generally in rehabilitation, we urge your opposition to it.