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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 25-H 5220, COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY-POLICE RELATIONSHIP ACT OF 2015 February 25, 2025

The ACLU of Rhode Island urges the committee to pass this important bill. Passage of the Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act (CCPRA) in 2015 was an important step in the state's ongoing efforts to address the severe and persistent problem of racial profiling. A component of that law required all police departments in the state to record detailed information about traffic stops and searches they conducted, and further required the issuance of annual reports analyzing that data for racial disparities. However, these requirements expired four years ago. This bill would reinstate that obligation and, just as importantly, it would ensure that the analysis of the data is presented to the public in a useful way and that police departments respond to the findings of any racial disparities in a meaningful fashion as well.

Past years of data collection have made clear to the ACLU – and to other organizations that have worked to address racial profiling since the state's first traffic stop data collection law was enacted more than two decades ago – that the mere collection of data and compilation of statistics are insufficient by themselves. If data collection is to be reinstated, which it should be, it is also essential that (1) there be stronger requirements in place to guide police departments' response to documented racial disparities and (2) the data is reported in a way that provides greater transparency and fulfills the goal that the data collection is designed to serve. Unfortunately, because that has not been the case, this bill seeks to favorably address these gaps.

Although the information collected in conjunction with the CCPRA has been done with the intent of providing greater transparency to the public, the presentation of the data has made its independent review and examination difficult for community groups and individuals alike. The details of the problems are rather technical, but suffice it to say that the tweaks provided in this bill regarding the presentation of the collected data will go a long way to promoting the transparency and oversight that are main goals of the data collection. Similarly, this legislation contains more robust requirements for police to respond to data that show significant racial disparities in a department's stop or search practices. What we found over the years is that some departments simply did not meaningfully address disparities uncovered in the annual reports that the statute required them to prepare.

Collecting data for the sake of collecting data only goes so far. Passage of this bill, which is the product of a great deal of compromise by the community groups supporting it, will, by its amendments to current law, promote greater transparency and accountability. To further highlight the need for this legislation, we have included on the other side of this testimony statistics we garnered from the last few years of data collection, and that demonstrate the continuation of significant racial disparities in the stopping and searching of cars. We hope that this will be the year the General Assembly reinstates this important law.

As the chart below exemplifies, racial disparities in traffic stop searches (just as the data have documented for traffic stops themselves over the course of two decades) are a severe and persistent problem.

Across all three years reviewed (2017-2019), the rate at which Black and Hispanic individuals are searched as a result of a traffic stop is consistently higher than the rate at which white drivers are searched. Black drivers were searched at more than two and a half times the rate of white drivers across each of these three years. Rates at which Hispanic drivers were searched exhibit similar disparities; across each of the three years, they were searched at a rate between roughly two and 10 times that of white drivers each year.

These disparities must be addressed through a more robust examination of all collected data. **H 5220 would provide a more comprehensive analysis of all data collected – stop and search – and require enhanced community oversight of the data to ensure both that it serves its intended purpose and that involvement in addressing this critical issue of racial justice is more accessible.**

