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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5454, RELATING TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY – COMMITTEES AND STAFF March 6, 2025

The ACLU of Rhode Island opposes this bill, which would require non-profit agencies seeking funding from the General Assembly to post on their website a variety of detailed financial information, including the salaries of the ten highest paid employees and all sources of the organization's funding. While there has been great concern over the years about the lack of transparency in the General Assembly grant process, we believe this bill has the wrong focus. It would significantly invade the privacy of non-profits and also impose significant burdens on many organizations that seek funds, as they are often small volunteer groups that are receiving relatively small sums of money.

When we have heard objections from the public about legislative grants, they have generally not been about the groups getting the grants per se. Rather, it is about the secretive nature of the legislative grant process and how the decisions get made on who will be given grants. This legislation would not address that issue at all.

Unrelated to these larger substantive concerns about the bill, we would point out two drafting issues. First, as worded, it is unclear whether the bill applies to requests for any state grants or just state grants from the General Assembly. We assume the latter, but the bill's wording is ambiguous. Second, we would note that the burdensome posting requirements apply to any group merely requesting funds, and not necessarily getting any. The privacy and bureaucratic issues raised by the bill are of concern enough, but to impose them as a condition of even asking for funds seems particularly onerous.

For all these reasons, the ACLU opposes this legislation. Thank you for considering our views.