

**ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT AND AMEND**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 21 – H 5699  
AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION  
March 23, 2021**

The ACLU of RI is appreciative of the opportunity to provide supportive testimony on this legislation which would both enhance opportunities for the development of teachers of color and would encourage and facilitate higher diversity in the educational work force.

Studies have well-documented the connection between teachers of color and higher achievement in BIPOC student populations. According to data provided by RIDE, 45% of students enrolled in the Rhode Island public school system as of October 2019 were BIPOC students. Yet, as of that same date, 89% of educators in our public schools were white.

We would like to comment on one specific element of disparity that we would encourage this legislation to address by amendment. For years, the ACLU has fought against the implementation of standardized testing as a component of procuring a teaching certificate, primarily because these standardized tests show considerable achievement gaps between white candidates and minority candidates. These achievement gaps result, at least in part, from the often-acknowledged discriminatory outcomes from the use of standardized testing mechanisms.

An analysis of the disparities between white test-takers and BIPOC test-takers exhibits racial discrepancies worthy of examination, especially for Praxis, which is the teacher certification test administered in Rhode Island. Nationwide, 92% of white test-takers passed the Praxis reading test compared to a 68% pass rate for African-American test-takers. This particular data point is not a sole outlier; consistently, Praxis tests reveal a wide disparity in pass rates between white and BIPOC teaching candidates who took Praxis.<sup>1</sup>

Until the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, Rhode Island law explicitly barred teacher applicants from being disqualified from teacher certification based solely on their performance on a standardized teaching test. In order to best serve people of color in our communities and our schools, the ACLU believes that the reinstatement of this prior restriction on the use of standardized testing should be adopted as an effective approach to increasing the number of qualified teachers of color in our schools. Relying on the results of a standardized teacher test to deny an applicant certification does not increase the quality of the teaching pool, but greatly harms equality. That requirement is a true barrier to reform.

In supporting this bill, we would therefore also strongly urge an amendment that would address and end the use of standardized teacher testing in certifying teachers in Rhode Island in light of the insidious way it lends itself to a lack of racial diversity among our educators.

Thank you for your consideration.

---

<sup>1</sup> Diversify the Education Workforce: Change Teacher Certification, <https://www.aft.org/news/diversify-education-workforce-change-teacher-certification>