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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 21 – H 6438, AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT – STATEWIDE BODY-WORN CAMERA PROGRAM June 18, 2021

As communities grapple with the best ways to ensure and promote transparency and accountability amongst our law enforcement agencies, the importance of creating uniform body-worn camera (BWC) policies for LEAs has become a key part of the discussion. The ACLU of RI supports this legislation which would create the statewide infrastructure for such a program.

As tools of oversight for both the police and the community, the deployment of BWCs on a statewide level is a positive development which recognizes the role that these devices can play in promoting transparency. Since this bill simply sets up the existence of the program, however, it will ultimately be the content of the regulations that are adopted to implement it that will determine its true value in ensuring accountability.

We appreciate that the legislation includes guidance as to the minimum issues which must be addressed through rulemaking, and that those regulations will be subject to community review and input via the Administrative Procedures Act. Among the many key issues that we look forward to addressing are meaningful standards on public access to BWC footage while also recognizing privacy interests; ensuring that BWCs do not utilize facial recognition technology or other technologies which could unintentionally bolster police surveillance; providing for disciplinary procedures for officers who fail to utilize BWCs in accordance with the regulations; and clear parameters for when BWCs must be activated.

Overall, this legislation represents an important step towards public oversight of public law enforcement work. We look forward to a continued discussion around this program as the regulations are put forward for public consideration, and are hopeful that, with strong regulations in place, the implementation of this program will promote true transparency and accountability.