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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 24-H 7476, RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- STATEWIDE REFERENDA ELECTIONS March 26, 2024

The ACLU of Rhode Island wishes to express its strong support for this bill, which would require ballot questions to be “written in plain language reasonably calculated to be understood by persons with an eighth-grade reading level.”

It is often very easy for public officials – and not-so-public officials – to couch legislative matters in bureaucratese and in long-winded ways that can obfuscate as much as enlighten. Voters going to the polls to vote on important ballot issues should not have to wade through a lot of jargon to appreciate and understand what they are being asked to vote on.

The recognition that important public-facing documents should be written in language that is easily comprehensible is itself an easily understood concept. Numerous online tools make it relatively straightforward to assess the reading level necessary to comprehend any piece of text, and setting an eighth-grade level has become relatively standard.

We commend the Secretary of State for promoting this legislation and we urge the committee to support it.