

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ACLU FOUNDATION OF RI

2021 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: IMPORTANT NON-DISCRIMINATION LAWS PASS; DISAPPOINTING LACK OF ACTION ON POLICE REFORM

When the General Assembly recessed on July 1st, promising to come back in the fall to complete unfinished business, they left with many positive accomplishments to report, particularly in the area of non-discrimination.

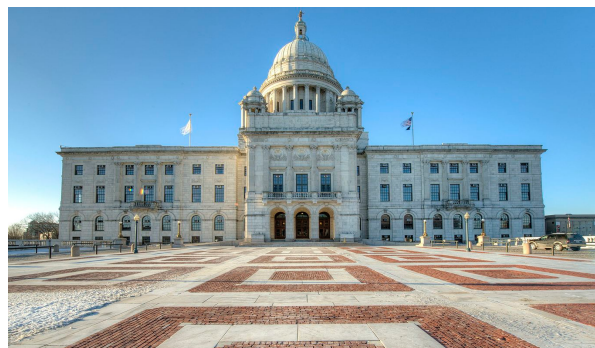
After years of roadblocks, the legislature approved bills promoting pay equity in the workplace and banning the use of gender to set health insurance premiums. Legislators also codified long-standing regulations allowing undocumented immigrants to qualify for in-state tuition at the state's colleges and university, and accommodated students with disabilities in the RI Promise scholarship program. The housing laws were amended to ban landlords from discriminating against tenants based on their source of income, and to bar rental discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in owner-occupied housing.

Other positive bills expected to be signed into law will bar denying occupational licenses to people with past convictions for crimes of "moral turpitude," authorize a pilot program establishing a safe injection site for individuals with substance use disorders, and establish a process for any adult to solemnize marriages without obtaining legislative approval.

On the other hand, conspicuous by its absence is what didn't pass. Despite a year of protests fueled by egregious acts of police misconduct, the General Assembly took no action on legislation to repeal or revise the Law Enforcement Officer Bill of Rights, failed to reinstate a law requiring the collection and analysis of demographic data from police stops and searches of vehicles, and refused to provide the public with greater access to reports of police misconduct.

In addition, despite being surrounded by states that have legalized cannabis, any Rhode Island law doing so will need to await the fall session. And two important student rights' bills – limiting the use of out-of-school suspensions on elementary school students, and providing students privacy protections in their use of school-loaned computers – failed to make it out of committee.

In this newsletter, you can read about these and some of the other 386 bills that the ACLU of RI lobbied on this year. For more information on our legislative advocacy, including access to written testimony on numerous bills, visit www.riaclu.org/legislation.



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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As you can see from the voting rights section of this newsletter, this legislative session was a disappointing one for election reform - even more so in light of the Supreme Court's recent regressive decision in an Arizona case undermining the federal Voting Rights Act. Congress enacted that law with the explicit intent of expanding access to the voting booth and broadly combatting discrimination in the electoral process. The court ruling allowed just the opposite.

I mention this because, left to their own devices, we know that political parties will always try to manipulate voting. That is exactly why voting rights has been such an important part of our agenda, and why our victory last year in the U.S. Supreme Court in the "mail ballot witness" case was so important.

It is also why, in light of this most recent SCOTUS decision, state-based legislative advocacy is more important than ever.

Working with the Let RI Vote Coalition, we will continue to press the General Assembly to promote comprehensive voting reform when legislators briefly return for a fall session. And of course, we still stand at the ready to go into court to vindicate the rights of voters whenever we can.

As for defending democratic principles, we may continue to have our work cut out for us, but your support makes that continued work possible. Thank you as always.

--Steven Brown

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GENDER EQUALITY

Gender Rating (S 0003 A, H 5763) - PASSED 👍

Nationwide, women have historically been charged more for the same health insurance than men, leaving them less able to purchase vital healthcare coverage. This practice is generally illegal under the Affordable Care Act, but the passage of this legislation, sponsored by Sen. Susan Sosnowski and Rep. Katie Kazarian, has codified that important prohibition into state law and expanded its reach.

Equal Pay (H 5261 A, S 270 A) - PASSED 👍

While closing the wage gap is essential for economic and social growth in RI, it is particularly important for BIPOC women, who are more likely to be in poverty than virtually all other demographics. We supported this legislation which strengthens the legal remedies available to address the problem of unequal pay for female workers (and other protected classes), and bans hiring practices that contribute to it, such as allowing employers to ask for the former salary of a prospective employee or barring employees from discussing their own salaries with each other.

THIS LEGISLATION STRENGTHENS THE LEGAL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF UNEQUAL PAY FOR FEMALE WORKERS.

Sex Work Decriminalization (H 5250) - PASSED 👍

This resolution creates a commission to study the impact of decriminalizing commercial sexual work in RI. The ACLU has long decried the disproportionate impact that prostitution arrests have on women and the inappropriate use of police resources for these crimes, and have emphasized that criminalizing consensual sex creates a more dangerous environment for sex workers.

LGBTQ RIGHTS

LGBTQ Discrimination and Fair Housing (H 6215, S 563) - PASSED 👍

We supported this legislation that makes a number of positive changes to the state's fair housing law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, including eliminating an exemption for owner-occupied housing.

Gender Inclusive Bathrooms (H 5741, S 755) - PASSED 👍

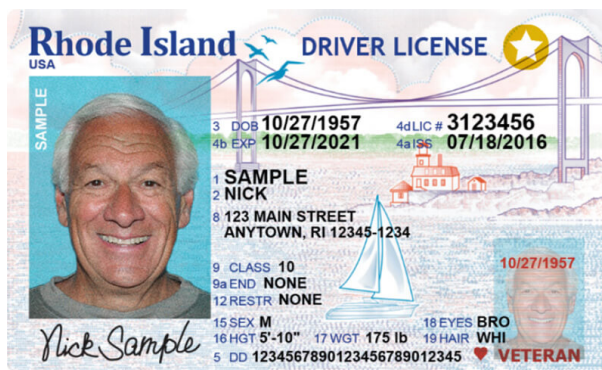
For transgender or gender non-conforming folks, access to private, safe bathroom facilities is critical. We supported this bill which requires that all newly constructed single-user public bathroom facilities be gender-neutral, and thus allows all Rhode Islanders to access restrooms in a non-stigmatizing manner.

IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS

In-State Tuition for Undocumented Students (H 5238, S 990)

- PASSED 👍

This bill ensures that higher education is accessible to students who have spent their adolescence in RI - but may not have citizenship status - by treating them as in-state residents for tuition purposes. The bill codifies an administrative regulation that had been in effect for a number of years. Not only is affordability of higher education a crucial component of educational equity, but, particularly for undocumented students, the benefit of making higher education accessible cannot be overstated.



Driver's Licenses for All (H 5305, S 190 Aam)

- DIED IN HOUSE 👎

This legislation would have expanded driver's license access to undocumented individuals, ensuring that they could lawfully drive to work, school, the doctor, or any other necessary location. The bill was supported by immigrants' rights groups as well as the State Police, who emphasized its importance as a road safety measure. Sponsored for many years by Sen. Frank Ciccone, the bill passed the Senate but died in the House.

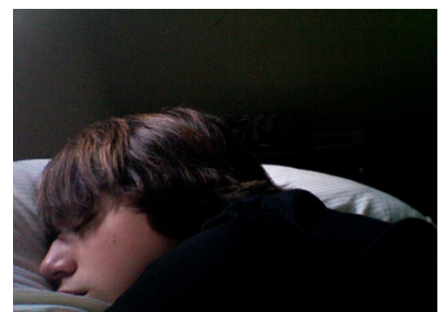
"364 Day Misdemeanor" (H 5488, S 518am, S 118) – DIED IN HOUSE 👎

For individuals here on green cards, a conviction on minor misdemeanor charges can have a severe and overly punitive – and unexpected – impact. Because these crimes are punishable by up to a year in prison, people who don't spend a day in jail are still subject to detention and deportation under a federal law that authorizes such action for conviction of any offense that carries a *potential* sentence of one year or more. This legislation would decrease the maximum possible sentence for a misdemeanor by one day – to 364 days – to ensure such harsh consequences don't flow from a minor offense. The bill, sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Michael McCaffrey and Jonathon Acosta, passed that chamber unanimously but died in the House.

STUDENTS' RIGHTS

School-Loaned Computer Privacy (H 5700, S 32) - DIED 👎

As students transitioned to virtual education during the COVID-19 pandemic, issues of student privacy on school-loaned devices became more prominent. A report we issued in September 2020 showed, to our great dismay, that most schools offer students no expectation of privacy when using these computers at home. We unsuccessfully urged enactment of this bill, sponsored by Rep. June Speakman and Sen. James Seveney, which would have provided technological privacy protections for students – including banning schools from surreptitiously accessing the microphones and cameras of these devices. We will be pressing for passage of this bill next year.



This screenshot of a student in his bed captured by school officials from his school-loaned laptop resulted in a major privacy lawsuit in PA.

School Resource Officers (H 5827 A, H 6029, H 5367) - DIED 🙌🙌

Though there are many law enforcement personnel on RI school campuses in the form of School Resource Officers (SROs), and despite a temporary statewide reimbursement program for the hiring of SROs, there is no standardized requirement for reporting data on their actions, even though their disproportionate punitive impact on BIPOC students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students is well-known (and evident from litigation we are involved in). We strongly supported a bill (H 5827A) that would have required public reporting of school-based arrests and SRO-related incidents. We also supported a bill (H 6029) providing funding for school social workers in place of the expiring statewide SRO program, but strongly opposed a bill (H 5367) that would have indefinitely extended that program. None passed.



A video still from an incident involving an SRO tackling a student at Narragansett High School. The incident is currently at the center of an ACLU of RI lawsuit.

RACIAL JUSTICE

Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act (CCPRA) (H 5653, S 122) - DIED 🙌

After the quiet expiration in 2020 of the CCPRA, a statute which mandated the collection of traffic stop and search data from every law enforcement agency in Rhode Island, we supported legislation that would have both renewed the law and imposed more stringent requirements on the analysis of the data. The bill, in addition to requiring the Department of Transportation to create a more publicly accessible platform for viewing the data, would have created a community oversight board to promote police accountability for evident racial disparities in traffic stops and searches. However, no action was taken on the legislation, which was sponsored by Rep. Edith Ajello and Sen. Ana Quezada.

School Discipline Reform (H 5234) - DIED 🙌

Despite the passage of legislation in 2016 designed to limit the overzealous use of out-of-school suspensions in RI schools, the discipline data for many school districts continues to display alarming disparities for both BIPOC students and students with disabilities, and shocking suspension rates for students in grades K-5. We supported this legislation which would have largely eliminated schools' ability to give out-of-school suspensions to students in K-5 and would strengthen the data reporting requirements for school districts.



Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (H 6153, H 5613, H 5140, S 505, S 773, S 865) - DIED 🙌

Law Enforcement Officers' Bills of Rights (LEOBOR) are a huge deterrent to meaningful police reform, and RI has one of the strongest LEOBOR statutes in the country. The law imposes numerous barriers to disciplining wayward officers, and significant revisions to the law are long overdue. A number of bills to do that were introduced this session. In supporting the general goals of these bills, the ACLU pressed for additional amendments to ensure more transparency over police misconduct. Citing a lack of consensus on how LEOBOR should

be reformed, legislative leaders allowed all the bills to die in committee, although the issue may be revisited at an expected special fall session of the General Assembly.

PRIVACY

Health Insurance Exchange (H 6210 A, S 495 A) - PASSED 👍

For over a decade, our organization has maintained that the inclusion of personal health care and medical information through the RI Health Insurance Exchange (HIE) – a centralized database of patients’ medical information – must be on a strictly voluntary basis through an opt-in, rather than an opt-out, system. We opposed this legislation which reverses this procedure and, by default, will include a patient’s information in the database. The ACLU unsuccessfully argued that when it comes to patient autonomy, opt-in procedures best protect autonomy by allowing patients to better control where and how their personal medical information is stored or disclosed.

State Police Computer System (H 5596 A, S 59 A) - PASSED 👍

Prompted by a 2019 shooting in Rhode Island which highlighted interjurisdictional information gaps among police departments, this bill will allow for the establishment of a comprehensive statewide police records management program. While we did not take a position on the bill in concept, we urged adoption of several amendments to strengthen privacy protections in the use of the database and to limit the maintenance of information relating to First Amendment-protected activities. While the bill passed with a few ACLU-proposed amendments included, others were not, and the ACLU will be pressing for additional safeguards during the implementation process for the database.



GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

Police Records & APRA (H 5859) - DIED 🙅

In response to an Attorney General advisory opinion which allows law enforcement agencies to withhold some final reports of internal investigations of police misconduct, even with personally identifiable information redacted, we supported legislation that would have clarified the Access to Public Records Act to ensure police accountability and transparency when it comes to those findings. This bill would have made clear that the public can see *all* final reports of police misconduct investigations and reinstated a more meaningful public oversight of law enforcement that the AG opinion undermined.

THIS BILL WOULD HAVE MADE CLEAR THAT THE PUBLIC CAN SEE ALL FINAL REPORTS OF POLICE MISCONDUCT INVESTIGATIONS.



Remote Open Meetings (H 5891 A) - DIED IN SENATE 🙅

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, public bodies needed to conduct “virtual” meetings to maintain both open government and public health. This legislation sought to enshrine into law the ability for public bodies to meet remotely for the next two years. We strongly opposed this timeline, noting that face-to-face interactions between elected officials and their constituents at public meetings is an integral part of

open government. When promoters of the legislation refused to reduce the sunset provision to one year and failed to include other open government safeguards, the ACLU opposed the legislation, and it died in the Senate after passing the House. As a result, in-person meetings for all public bodies are expected to resume in September, although the ACLU will continue to urge that they be livestreamed as well.

FIRST AMENDMENT

Traffic Interference (H 5001, H 6269, S 404) – DIED 👍

We opposed this disturbing legislation that would have made interference with traffic by standing, sitting, kneeling, or otherwise loitering on a highway a felony punishable by three years in prison. Our testimony noted that not only did this bill target individuals engaged in First Amendment-related activity, but the penalties were incredibly punitive. The punishment for this crime would have been more severe than that for drunk driving. No action was taken on the legislation.

THIS BILL WOULD HAVE MADE “LOITERING” ON A HIGHWAY A FELONY PUNISHABLE BY UP TO THREE YEARS IN PRISON.

Solemnization of Marriage (H 5034 A, S 14 B) – PASSED 👍

If a couple wanted you to officiate at their wedding and you weren’t a member of the clergy or among a list of certain public officials, you’ve needed to get a General Assembly resolution passed to do so. That will no longer be the case under this enacted legislation. It establishes a streamlined administrative process for individuals to gain authority to solemnize marriages without needing to “know a guy.” ACLU lobbying efforts helped eliminate unnecessary qualifications in earlier versions of the legislation, including ones barring individuals serving probation or parole from officiating, requiring that an individual be eligible to vote in Rhode Island to qualify, and giving the Governor broad discretion to deny officiating privileges on an individual basis. Fortunately, all those barriers were removed in the final version of the bill, essentially making the officiation process automatic.

Senate Rules (S 336 Aam) – PASSED 👎

The RI Senate rules adopted this session contained a new and disturbing provision. Introduced right before the rules were voted on in committee, the provision allows committee chairs to require members of the public to testify under oath. We unsuccessfully urged deletion of this power, expressing concerns that its implementation could chill the First Amendment rights of residents by inappropriately holding the threat of a perjury charge over the head of witnesses. Fortunately, the new rule was not invoked by any committee chairs this session.



Workplace Bullying (H 6352, S 196) – DIED IN HOUSE 👍

While ensuring a healthy workplace is a laudable goal, we opposed this legislation which would have created a far-reaching “civility code” and imposed liability on employers or co-workers who were, among other things, “overbearing.” We argued that the standards ran afoul of First Amendment protections by seeking to regulate and punish routine personal interactions, and objected that the bill’s proposed remedies provided even broader protections than those available to victims of race or sex discrimination under the state Fair Employment Practices Act. The bill died in the House after passing the Senate.

Child Erotica (H 5614 A, S 502 A) – PASSED 👎

Though child pornography is a scourge, we opposed legislation that now carves out a new exception to the First Amendment and criminalizes the possession or display of vaguely defined “child erotica” – any depictions of “partially clothed” minors if used for the “specific purpose of sexual gratification or arousal.” The distribution or display of constitutionally protected material cannot be elevated to a criminal offense solely because of how the person viewing it reacts, yet this bill could subject individuals to punishment based on a prediction of how they respond to protected speech. Other groups joined the ACLU in opposing the bill, noting it could impact youth exploring their sexuality.

Hate Crimes Sentencing Act (H 6147 A, S 803) & Office of the Civil Rights Advocate (H 5860, S 729) – DIED IN HOUSE 👍

Though purportedly intended to address issues of police misconduct, we opposed legislation (H 5860, S 729) introduced by the Attorney General which would have given the state more power to investigate those protesting or organizing against police abuse. Among other concerning provisions, the bill allowed for the interrogation of any individual who might have information about unlawful activities, and imposed up to a \$10,000 fine if they did not comply. We noted that this power could be used against those organizing against police misconduct and urged rejection of the bill as written.

And, although hate crimes deserve condemnation, we also opposed legislation (H 6147 A, S 803 A) to expand the scope of the Hate Crimes Sentencing Act in a way which could have authorized increased criminal penalties based solely on the defendant's speech without a finding of animus. We expressed particular concern over an expansion of the definition of "hate crime" to include any person or group being the target of a crime "in whole or in part" due to a protected characteristic such as race, and noted the law could be used against Black Lives Matter protesters charged with a minor offense resulting from a protest. After passing the Senate, both of these bills died in the House, thanks to opposition from the ACLU and a number of LGBTQ groups, Black Lives Matter RI PAC and other community groups concerned about the implications of the law.

**AS WORDED, THIS
LEGISLATION COULD BE
USED TO ENHANCE THE
PENALTIES AGAINST BLACK
LIVES MATTER PROTESTERS
CHARGED WITH A MINOR
OFFENSE RESULTING FROM
A PROTEST.**

**THIS BILL WAS A DIRECT
ASSAULT ON FREE SPEECH AND
ACADEMIC FREEDOM, AND
WOULD HAVE QUASHED
IMPORTANT TEACHING AND
CONVERSATION ON
INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND
SEXISM.**

Prohibition on Teaching "Divisive Concepts" (H 6070) - DIED 👍

Noting that this bill was a direct assault on free speech and academic freedom, and would quash important teaching and conversation on institutional racism and sexism, we opposed legislation that sought to ban the teaching of "divisive topics" in public schools. Among other things, the bill would have barred teaching of subjects that could cause "discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress" to an individual on account of their race or sex – language so vague and subjective that it was inherently unenforceable and blatantly unconstitutional. Similar bills are being considered across the country and being given a warmer greeting than here, where it was not given serious consideration.

DISABILITY RIGHTS

RI Promise Scholarship and Students with Disabilities (H 5224 A) – PASSED 👍

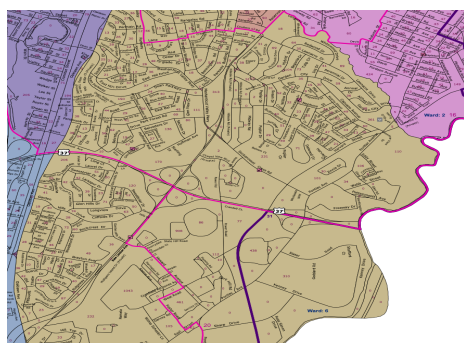
This enacted legislation ensures that the RI Promise Program – which provides free tuition to students attending CCRI – accommodates students with disabilities. Earlier this year, we successfully resolved a complaint on behalf of a student who, due to her disability, needed three years to complete her courses, but was charged tuition for her third year because the Promise Program only ensured funding for two years of courses. This legislation guarantees that students with disabilities are able to equally partake in the benefits of this scholarship program.



VOTING RIGHTS

Election Reform (H 6003, S 516) – DIED 🙅

Though the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating in so many respects, it did demonstrate that changes in our voting system to ensure and expand accessibility were both achievable and sustainable. This comprehensive legislation, the “Let RI Vote Act,” was supported by more than two dozen advocacy groups and introduced to build upon the successfully implemented changes of the 2020 election cycle. It included provisions to officially codify an early voting process, a permanent mail ballot list, and the removal of the onerous two-witness signature or notary requirement for mail ballots which we successfully sued over last year all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Despite enormous coalition efforts, no action was taken on the bill. Also held for further study was legislation we supported from the Board of Elections (H 5744, S 625) which would have allowed candidates, as a part of the ballot nomination process, to gather electronic signatures from constituents. A lawsuit filed by our Affiliate on behalf of candidates seeking to collect signatures in this manner during the pandemic was successfully settled and implemented, and we supported the adoption of a permanent protocol for this process. Unfortunately, none of these bills passed.



Cranston, Ward 6, Home of the ACI

Prison Gerrymandering (H 5285, S 334) – DIED 🙅

When it comes to drawing new voting districts, any individuals incarcerated at the ACI in Cranston on the day the Census worker comes through are recorded as living on Howard Avenue at the prison – including individuals awaiting trial or serving misdemeanor sentences who are still allowed to vote, but only from their home addresses. As a result, Cranston is overrepresented in the General Assembly, while the districts from where the prisoners hail are underrepresented. (Approximately 15% of House District 20, where the ACI is located, is comprised of voters who cannot vote in Cranston.) The

ACLU once again supported legislation to rectify this disparity and require all prisoners to be counted, for voting purposes only, at their last known address. The Prison Policy Initiative joined us in support of this legislation, but due to the General Assembly’s inaction, the possibility for fixing this problem won’t be able to take effect until the next Census.

Counting of Write-In Votes (H 5999, S 624) – DIED 🙅

All voters fundamentally deserve the right to have their votes counted – regardless of who they vote for. For this reason, we once again opposed a bill sponsored by the state Board of Elections which would have eliminated the counting of write-in votes for persons who had not filed in advance a “declaration of intent.”

Reapportionment Commission (H 6222 A, S 852 A) – PASSED

The General Assembly adopted its decennial legislation creating a commission charged with redrawing legislative district lines based on the latest census figures. The ACLU urged amendments to better ensure a process that was fair and transparent and that apportioned districts to protect the rights of BIPOC voters. We also urged that the commission address prison gerrymandering, the subject of a separate bill. Not surprisingly, though, the bill passed with virtually no changes. As we have done in the past, the ACLU will be actively monitoring the Commission’s activities.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

"Moral Turpitude" (H 5599, S 1001) – PASSED 👍

Conviction for a crime of “moral turpitude” is a legally ambiguous and antiquated term found in a few dozen statutes as a basis to deny or revoke a person’s professional license. The phrase is defined in Black’s Law Dictionary as “conduct that is contrary to justice, honesty or morality” – not a terribly helpful standard. Since no person should fear being denied entry to a profession due to this hopelessly vague term, we testified in support of this legislation which eliminates the phrase from those statutes. The bill passed overwhelmingly.

ONE DEFINITION OF “MORAL TURPITUDE” IN BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY IS “CONDUCT THAT IS CONTRARY TO JUSTICE, HONESTY OR MORALITY” – NOT TERRIBLY HELPFUL.

THIS LEGISLATION COULD HAVE DETERRED PARENTS AND GUARDIANS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS FROM MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING IN THEIR STUDENT’S SCHOOLING.

School Volunteer Criminal Record Check (H 5748, S 393) – DIED 👍

In a move that would have prevented parents and guardians with criminal records from meaningfully engaging in their child’s schooling, this bill would have required a federal background check before any person volunteered or interned at a public school. We noted this could prevent engaged parents or guardians from volunteering solely on the basis of a criminal charge which could predate their child’s birth. We additionally expressed concerns that the bill’s fingerprinting

requirement would deter undocumented parents or guardians from volunteering. We were successful in urging rejection of this needlessly stigmatizing bill.

Criminal Justice Reform (H 6122, Article 13)

– PASSED 👍👍

An Article in the approved FY 2022 budget contains several important criminal justice reforms, including provisions for geriatric parole and making adjustments to statutes concerning community confinement, work-release wages, and parole review. Another provision establishes a process for young people sentenced to lengthy prison sentences to be able to come before the parole board after serving twenty years.

Unfortunately, the new law also explicitly authorizes “life without parole” sentences for juveniles, a sentence that 25 states – red and blue – have banned in recent years and that the ACLU of RI had been lobbying to prohibit through other legislation. The ACLU is concerned that this particular provision not only undermines a national trend, but could encourage prosecutors to begin seeking non-parole sentences against juveniles charged with serious offenses.



**2021
LEGISLATIVE
SCORECARD**



In 2021, the ACLU of RI lobbied on 386 bills and tracked 1,040 pieces of legislation. To see how your Reps and Senators voted on some of those bills this year, go to:

www.riaclu.org/legislative-scorecards.

DRUG REFORM

Reclassification of Drug Possession (H 6083 A) - PASSED 🙌🙌

The General Assembly considered two competing bills designed to reclassify the possession of certain controlled substances as misdemeanors rather than felonies but, unfortunately, approved the more



problematic one that was promoted by the Attorney General. The bill fully supported by the ACLU, and pressed by the drug reform group SUPER PAC, would have made possession of 28 grams or less of certain drugs a misdemeanor. The AG bill only reduces that threshold to 10 grams. More problematically, the AG bill drastically *increased* – from three to fifty years – the maximum penalty for possessing *other* controlled substances, such as methamphetamine. While the penalty reductions in the bill that has been passed are not to be ignored, the mixed message that passage of this particular legislation sends is very troubling.

Legalization of Recreational Marijuana (H 6122 - Article 11; S 568) - DIED IN HOUSE

As the likelihood of recreational marijuana legalization in RI advances, its approval will need to wait until the fall. While the Senate passed a legalization bill, House leadership said more time was needed to consider the issue. For the ACLU, it is critical to ensure that civil liberties are protected and social equity concerns are prioritized in any legalization bill that is enacted. The Senate bill substantively addressed a number of social justice issues, including limitations on criminal record checks for employment, specific funding for social justice and equity initiatives, and protections against discrimination for responsible marijuana users in the workplace. However, we suggested numerous additional amendments to build upon and strengthen those provisions. We also testified on a series of bills in the House - [H 5451](#), [H 5452](#), and [H 5453](#) – designed to promote racial and economic equity in the marijuana legalization process, but all those bills died in committee.



ONE OF THE MOST
EFFECTIVE WAYS TO
ADDRESS SUBSTANCE USE
DISORDER IS WITH CLINICS
WHERE PEOPLE SELF-
ADMINISTER CONTROLLED
SUBSTANCES UNDER
MEDICAL SUPERVISION.

Harm Reduction Centers (H 5245 A, S 16 B) - PASSED 🙌

Although it may appear counterintuitive, one of the most effective ways to address substance use disorder is with clinics where people self-administer controlled substances under medical supervision. The success rate of these harm reduction clinics, which provide a safe haven for individuals and access to rehabilitative and medical services, is extremely high; worldwide, they have prevented thousands of overdose deaths. In the midst of a continuing opioid epidemic in Rhode Island and throughout the country, we testified in favor of this legislation which authorizes a pilot program for these clinics. The enacted bill, the first in the nation to formally establish such a program at the state level, also provides clients, employees, volunteers and other personnel protection from any adverse law enforcement action while participating.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Ban on Source of Income Discrimination (H 5257, S 561) – PASSED 👍

This enacted legislation provides a critical protection against housing discrimination based on an applicant's source of income, an issue which particularly impacts marginalized communities. Prior to the legislation's passage, landlords could – and did – deny housing to individuals because the applicant used income originating from Social Security, child support payments, or Section 8 vouchers. This legislation prohibits that type of discrimination and ensures that no tenant is denied housing due to the origin of their rent money.



Equality in Abortion Act (H 5787, S 267) – DIED 👎

Building upon the work of the Reproductive Privacy Act enacted two years ago, the Equality in Abortion Act would have ensured that abortion care is covered by Medicaid and the health insurance plans of state employees. This critical legislation would have guaranteed that abortion is not only a legal right for all Rhode Islanders, but that it is economically accessible as well. The legislation died in committee.

CIVIL LIBERTIES ADVOCACY 101 GUIDE

The best way to protect your civil liberties is to advocate for them directly. Your legislators need to hear about what matters to you, and it is always easier for them to vote to defend your rights if they can understand how the bills they consider affect their constituents.

Want to learn more? Our Advocacy 101 guide (www.riaclu.org/advocacy101) shows you how with information on:

- How a bill becomes a law in RI
- How lobbying at the RI Statehouse actually works
- Ways to communicate with your legislators
- How to testify before a legislative committee

Visit www.riaclu.org/advocacy101 for free access to all the resources and easy-to-print pdfs.



Advocacy 101: Testifying Remotely (During COVID-19)

Because the General Assembly is meeting remotely this session, there are special procedures in place for the public to testify.

MAY 1, 2021



ADVOCACY 101: The RI State House

Going to the State House can seem overwhelming, but don't let that be a reason for you to stay home.

JANUARY 1, 2021



ADVOCACY 101: 10 Tips for Testifying Before a Legislative Committee

Here are 10 quick tips for testifying before a legislative committee.

JANUARY 1, 2021



ADVOCACY 101: How to Talk So Your Legislator Will Listen

As constituents, you can and should talk with your legislators.

JANUARY 1, 2021



ADVOCACY 101: How to Write to Your Legislator

Letters & emails are a useful advocacy tactic.

JANUARY 1, 2021



ADVOCACY 101: What You Can Do & When You Can Do It

Here's a brief look at what you can do to advocate at different points during the legislative process.

JANUARY 1, 2021



ADVOCACY 101: How a Bill Becomes a Law

There are basic rules that guide the movement of legislation through the Rhode Island General Assembly.

JANUARY 1, 2021

RSVP TODAY!

Tuesday, August 3, 2021, 5:30 PM - via ZOOM

WHAT: Our Annual Legislative Wrap-Up

WHEN: Tuesday, August 3, 2021, 5:30 PM - via ZOOM

WHO: Learn from RI legislators and ACLU of RI lobbyists about how civil liberties fared in the 2021 session.

PS. Since this will be held virtually, it's a BYOD – bring your own dessert. But you only have to walk as far as your computer or device – and parking will be a breeze!

To register for this free Zoom event, visit www.riaclu.org/events.

24 _____ Weeks in the RI Legislative Session
1,040 _____ Bills we tracked
386 _____ Bills we lobbied on

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