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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

**TESTIMONY ON 25-S 623,
RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- CASINO GAMING
March 26, 2025**

This bill would make it a misdemeanor, punishable by a year in prison and/or a \$1,000 fine, for a person between the ages of 18 and 21 to engage in electronic casino gaming, or iGaming. The ACLU urges rejection of this bill.

Presently, people between these ages have the right to engage in casino gaming, but the new iGaming law bars them from participating electronically. Leaving aside the question of whether these two forms of gaming should be treated differently in this context, it would not be surprising if many of these individuals weren't even aware of the difference and unknowingly engaged in conduct that, under this bill, carries a potential prison sentence.

Just as troubling to us is the fact that the punishment for an adult teenager making an iGaming bet is the same under this bill as that of an older adult who knowingly accepts a wager from that teenager. To hold both individuals equally culpable is wrong.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, we would note that in similar contexts of young people engaged in these types of status offenses – such as smoking or possessing alcohol – state law does not treat these minor transgressions as criminal offenses. Instead, at most, these young people are subject to civil fines. There is simply no compelling reason for sending them into the prison pipeline for victimless, but unlawful, gaming conduct either. The state's resources would be much better spent focusing on education instead of criminal punishment.

For all these reasons, the ACLU of RI strongly opposes this legislation.