



April 29, 2021

RE: OPPOSITION TO 21-S 729

Dear Members of Senate Judiciary Committee:

In the past year, we have made our voices heard against police brutality. We have demanded immediate changes in police practices and drastic limits on their powers. Yet S-729, while purportedly aimed at battling police misconduct, instead gives a law enforcement agency – the Attorney General’s office – even broader powers than it currently has.

Though its stated aim is to address police misconduct, this bill gives the AG powers that could just as easily be used to investigate the organizers and participants in protests against police abuse. Specifically, the bill gives the Attorney General’s office the power, in conducting non-criminal investigations, to summon for interrogation any person who might have information about *potential* unlawful activities, and compel that person to disclose whatever he or she knows, or else face up to a \$10,000 fine and contempt of court sanctions for failing to comply.

Consider how those powers could be used to interrogate individuals who were “believed to have information” about the disturbance that took place in downtown Providence during the George Floyd protests last year. Consider the felony charges that were lodged last June against individuals for their “vandalism” of the Christopher Columbus statue which, if deemed to have been targeted at Italian-Americans, would give the Attorney General wide-ranging authority to question individuals, including members of organizations involved in protests relating to the topic, whom he believed might have relevant information to offer. Though we realize this is not the bill’s intent, its potentially chilling overreach is clear to us.

We strongly support efforts to investigate law enforcement agencies and to hold them accountable for depriving individuals of their civil rights, and we would not oppose legislation that was specifically and solely focused on addressing that issue. But S-729 is not the vehicle to accomplish that goal. In the wrong hands, the powers it authorizes could easily be abused.

Our organizations have many suggestions and demands for addressing police misconduct. Listen to us when we say this is not one of them. We call on you to oppose S-729.

Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE)
Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE)
Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)
Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)