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**TESTIMONY BEFORE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL ORDINANCE COMMITTEE ON
"CAMPING ON CITY OWNED PROPERTY"**

August 15, 2024

The ACLU of Rhode Island wishes to register its strong opposition to this punitive ordinance proposed by the mayor and aimed at the city's homeless population.

In addition to making illegal any temporary shelter on City property – shelter that the ordinance itself recognizes is erected for the specific purpose of providing protection from "the natural elements" – the ordinance would impose a \$50 fine on violators and provide for the destruction of the individual's personal property after 24 hours.

This proposal is extraordinarily cruel. We know that some municipalities across the country are seeking to take callous advantage of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision in the *Grants Pass* case to punish the homeless in myriad ways, but it would be unfortunate to see any municipality in Rhode Island follow suit.

Forcing homeless people to move when they have nowhere to go, and engaging in the surreal attempt to fine them when, almost by definition, they have no money, are deeply harmful and completely ineffective responses to a serious societal problem. The proposal's further heartless plan to quickly dispose of the little property these individuals have, rather than retain it for a reasonable period of time for retrieval, raises serious constitutional concerns independent of the *Grants Pass* ruling.

Like the City's previous ill-fated attempts to ban panhandling, Rhode Island's serious homelessness crisis cannot be solved by punishing the victims of that crisis. The ACLU urges the committee to reject this misguided proposal and to instead encourage more useful, compassionate and systemic solutions when addressing this critical issue.

Submitted by: Steven Brown, Executive Director
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