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## COMMENTS ON 2010-H 7343, RELATING TO POLITICAL SURVEILLANCE

The Rhode Island ACLU strongly supports this bill, which would prohibit state and local law enforcement from collecting information about the **political, religious, or social views, associations, or activities of any individual, group, association, organization, corporation, or business** unless the information is directly related to a criminal investigation. The bill also prohibits law enforcement from using agency funds or federal funds to interfere with peaceful protests and other protected expression.

This bill would take crucial steps to ban the types of surveillance and data collection that we know have taken place in Rhode Island and across the country in recent years:

- A few years ago, we learned that peaceful protesters in Providence were placed in a Department of Defense “terrorism” database after staging a demonstration outside the Army National Guard recruiting station. It remains unclear exactly what role local police played in passing along information about this protest, but there have been similar revelations of unlawful police spying across the country in the past year.
- At about the same time, the Providence Police Department spent more than \$100,000 of federal homeland security grant money to train officers on how to “prepare for and successfully mitigate” peaceful protests.
- Five years ago, Woonsocket Police Department officers improperly used a confidential database to access license plate numbers of people who attended a mayoral fundraiser.
- Only last year, Johnston police handed over to a town councilman information on a person whose car displayed a political bumper sticker opposed by the councilman.
- Rhode Island is one of a number of states that now has a “fusion center,” an entity run by the State Police to gather and analyze intelligence information. In other states, these fusion centers have been found to inappropriately engage in political surveillance. Passage of this bill would ensure that Rhode Island’s fusion center stayed within proper bounds.

Attached is some documentation of the problem. It makes clear the need for House Bill 7343’s modest restrictions. We urge the Committee to say “no” to police spying and to approve this bill.