



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE/AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5421, RELATING TO SCHOOL BUS SAFETY ENFORCEMENT February 25, 2025

The ACLU of Rhode Island has a long history of opposition to camera-enforced traffic laws, and that includes school bus cameras. We believe the use of devices like these often raise privacy and due process concerns. And while municipalities will argue that they are not designed as a revenue-raising measure, there can be no question that they vastly benefit the bottom line of the companies servicing these cameras. However, we will not use the opportunity of this bill's hearing to reiterate all of those general concerns. Instead, we wish to focus on two particular provisions that we urge the committee to address through amendment if it is going to consider favorable action on this bill.

1. The cameras are routinely used to charge motorists with violating R.I.G.L. 31-51-2.2, a statute in this same section of the law barring drivers from passing school buses when their flashing lights are on. However, on Page 1, line 9, this bill also proposes an amendment to refer to R.I.G.L. 31-20-12, which makes illegal the same offense and additionally makes it unlawful to drive at a distance less than 50 feet from a school bus. We oppose the inclusion of this statutory reference for two reasons. First, it would, unfairly in our view, appear to allow drivers to be charged twice under different statutes for the same offense. Second, these camera systems are not meant or equipped to monitor compliance with any distance requirement, also making this reference problematic.

2. If school bus cameras are going to become ubiquitous by state mandate, we strongly urge an additional amendment to the current statute, and that is to delete on Page 1, line 5 the words "at a minimum." School districts should not be purchasing camera technology that does anything more than detect school bus violations, but this phrase authorizes schools to do so. Giving districts the right to purchase even more invasive surveillance technology is very troubling, and those concerns are exacerbated when the use of school bus cameras is made mandatory.

We urge the committee to take our concerns and suggested changes into consideration should this legislation be considered for passage. Thank you for considering our views.