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ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5656, RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES – GAMBLING AND LOTTERIES March 25, 2025

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this legislation, which would authorize private social gambling events under certain conditions. This type of activity is not only currently illegal under Rhode Island law, in many instances the conduct constitutes a felony. But the types of “crimes” that would be exempted by this bill are victimless and certainly should not carry the punitive consequences that they do currently, especially when one considers the gambling that is now officially condoned by – and run by – the state.

Our organization has long supported the decriminalization of victimless crimes such as social gambling. Hanging the threat of a criminal sentence over the head of individuals for conduct that is not in any way physically or otherwise harmful to others, and that is engaged in regularly by a large portion of the population, can only breed disrespect for the law. For the legislature to take steps towards exempting specific acts like these which are currently illegal but do not harm the community is a positive trend in counteracting the statehouse-to-prison pipeline.

For these reasons, we support passage of this legislation. Thank you for your consideration of our views.