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MEDIA RELEASE

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ACLU of Wisconsin urges legislators to strengthen Budget's racial profiling provision while evaluating primary seat belt enforcement

Milwaukee – Americans agree that sometimes police use racial, ethnic or religious stereotypes as a factor in selecting which motor vehicle drivers to stop and search. The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin wants law enforcement agencies to determine the extent of unlawful racial profiling and to stop it. Because seat belt enforcement is so common, the ACLU of Wisconsin is wary of a budget provision allowing officers for the first time to make stops solely for the purpose of enforcing seat belt use requirements.

Today, the ACLU/WI sent a letter on two budget provisions to Representative Jason Fields (D-Milwaukee) which it shared with the co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Finance. The letter urges legislators, “to strengthen the proposed budget’s racial profiling section and to evaluate and potentially sunset its primary seat belt enforcement section.”

“These two budget provisions are related because one addresses the problem of racial profiling, while the other allowing primary seat belt enforcement could exacerbate the problem of racial profiling,” said ACLU of Wisconsin’s executive director, Chris Ahmuty.

“We are suggesting that Wisconsin go ahead with a trial of primary seat belt enforcement, but sunset it until analysis of racial profiling data determines that primary seat belt enforcement is not a source of unlawful stops and searches based in part on racial profiling,” Ahmuty added.

“Ever since the Governor Tommy Thompson created the Governor’s Task on Racial Profiling in 1999, we have been waiting for action. Ten years is long enough to wait,” Ahmuty concluded.

The ACLU of Wisconsin is a membership organization whose mission is the protection of the civil liberties and civil rights of all Wisconsin residents in a nonpartisan manner.

The ACLU of Wisconsin’s letter to Representative Fields and the JFC is attached.