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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5232, AN ACT RELATING TO ELECTIONS – MAIL BALLOTS March 18, 2025

Perhaps one of the few positive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is the spotlight that this crisis shone on the right to vote and the need for modern, updated, and accessible methods of exercising the franchise. Rhode Island rapidly responded to this need and in the last few years has made strides in ensuring that the ability to vote in our state is more robust than it has been before. For these reasons, we oppose this legislation which would pare back the amount of time that voters currently have to engage in early voting, chipping away at an important component of voter accessibility to the polls.

Currently, Rhode Island voters may vote early during the twenty days preceding Election Day; this legislation would shorten that time frame to a maximum of ten days. The benefits of the twenty-day early voting period are expansive and ensure ample opportunity for all registered voters to cast their vote, especially with the complications of work schedules, child care, and the many responsibilities that all adults must navigate. Many voters have utilized the early voting process in the short period of time it has been available, clearly demonstrating its value.

While some opponents have expressed concern about intervening events that can occur between the casting of an early vote and the day of the election, the decision to vote in this manner is purely voluntary and should be accepted, just as we accept individuals voting early by mail ballot.

Because this legislation would decrease access to voting that has only recently been expanded to all Rhode Island voters, we oppose this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.