



Testimony in Opposition to HB 5232 & HB 5137

An Act Related to Elections

House State Government & Elections

March 17, 2025

Hector Perez-Aponte, Racial Justice Policy Analyst

The Economic Progress Institute **strongly opposes Representative Brien’s HB 5232 and HB 5137**, which would authorize several unnecessary restrictions to voting and would cause an undue burden on both Rhode Island voters and our institutions.

To ensure elections in Rhode Island are free and fair, every eligible voter must have easy access to the ballot. Early voting has played a crucial role in making sure all eligible Rhode Islanders can exercise their right to vote. **HB 5232** would limit early voting by reducing the duration of early voting and eliminating the ability to vote on the second weekend immediately preceding election day. This would not only undermine the ability of thousands of eligible voters to exercise their right to vote, but it would also reduce equity in RI. For example, elderly, Black, and Latino voters disproportionately participate in early and weekend voting, which means they would be disproportionately disadvantaged by this bill. Voters of color also consistently face longer wait times on Election Day, and these lines could be exacerbated by limiting alternatives options such as early and weekend voting.¹ Furthermore, by spreading out voting over several days, election officials have more time to detect potential issues, report accurately, and mitigate any potential security challenges related to elections².

Representative Brien’s **HB 5137** would require the state board of elections to verify the citizenship status of everyone on the voter registration list in the state by comparing voter registrations with the citizenship data available across multiple state and national databases; voters whose citizenship cannot be verified will be purged from the list of eligible voters. The bill would also require the state board of elections to similarly use databases to verify citizenship before any new voter registration can be accepted. Notably, the legislation does not provide any mandate for the speed with which the state board of elections is expected to verify citizenship for all new registrants; this omission means that the state board of election could potentially take weeks or months to verify new voter registrations.

HB 5137 is not only bad for democracy, but also unnecessary, as it is already illegal for noncitizens to vote or register to vote, and RI already has voter identification laws in place. **H5137** would also create an administrative and financial burden on the state board of elections, which would have to carry out this massive task; at a time when the state is facing a significant

¹ https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/6_02_WaitingtoVote_FINAL.pdf

² <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/12/10/1013584/expanding-voting-access-improves-election-security/>



budget deficit, this is not a responsible or equitable use of funds. This bill could also prove to be a logistical nightmare with disastrous consequences for voters. In 2019, Texas incorrectly flagged several eligible citizens for removal from the voter registry, and Alabama incorrectly deactivated the registrations of at least 2,074 individuals who were eligible to vote, despite cross referencing the data with several state agencies as H5137 proposes.³ Kansas briefly experimented with a similar policy and the results proved to be disastrous. The law blocked 30,000 potential registrants in two years, approximately 12% of voters. In the aftermath, Kansas state officials conceded that 99% of impacted voters were indeed U.S. citizens.⁴ Finally, there is simply no evidence to demonstrate that voter fraud is a serious or legitimate cause for concern. Extensive research continues to show that voter fraud is rare, voter impersonation is difficult to perform, and several instances of alleged fraud were actually mistakes made by administrators.⁵

We strongly urge this committee to oppose both HB 5232 and HB 5137.

³ <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/12/nx-s1-5147789/voting-election-2024-noncitizen-fact-check-trump>

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2024/10/12/nx-s1-5147789/voting-election-2024-noncitizen-fact-check-trump>

⁵ <https://www.brennancenter.org/issues/ensure-every-american-can-vote/vote-suppression/myth-voter-fraud>