

March 18, 2025

The Honorable Evan Shanley
Chair
House Committee on State Government and Elections
Rhode Island House of Representatives
State of Rhode Island
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: HB 5382 An Act Relating to Elections – General Provisions

Dear Chair Shanley,

My name is Henry Siravo. I am a First-Year student at Roger Williams University and a graduate of Smithfield High School. While there, I was one of the Student Representatives to our School Committee. There is no denying that School Committees have an excise influence on the day-to-day lives of students– from funding the arts, cracking down on vape usage, and everything else that fosters a school environment. These Committees have a direct effect on whether students will be excited to go to school every day, or if they'd rather skip– and according to the Department of Education, nearly a quarter of students were chronically absent last academic year.

Parents may hear about a lot from their kids. Maybe at the dinner table, they will hear from their teenager how a new sports team was formed, or about overcrowded bathrooms. They might hear how their art class finally got new paint brushes, maybe that the school could really use a new counselor. Or, a parent may hear about none of this. How many voters–parents or not– walk into the voting booth blissfully unaware of what is going on inside our schools? Regardless of what a student shares, or doesn't, it is the student that bears the brunt of every School Committee decision. They are the ones being punched down– but maybe if they had a true voice, they would be getting a helping hand.

HB 5382 gives Americans the right to vote in elections that have a direct impact on their lives. In civics class, we are taught that our vote is our voice. By the time most teenagers get that right, this lesson is forgotten or dispelled– but by giving students the power to vote while they're still in the classroom, you can foster a strong habit of voting early and often.

HB 5382 encourages democracy and strengthens schools. It gives 16-and 17-year olds a voice and the ability to make their school districts a better environment for learning and growing. As a recent high school graduate, I highly encourage you to pass this bill.

Respectfully,
Henry Siravo