

RHODE ISLAND COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

180 WESTMINSTER STREET

PROVIDENCE, RI 02903

TESTIMONY

BILL NO.: 2025 H 5515
BILL TITLE: Joint Resolution to Approve and Publish and Submit to the
Electors a Proposition of Amendment to the Constitution – of
Suffrage
PRIMARY SPONSOR: Representative Alzate
COMMITTEE: House State Government & Elections

The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) **supports** this resolution which increases access to voting.

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. Among the allegations investigated by the Commission are those of race, ancestral origin, age and disability discrimination in employment and housing.

The Commission believes that passage of this resolution, which would make it easier for Rhode Island citizens to vote, would provide more opportunity for voting by ethnic minorities. H 5515 starts the process for voters to consider an amendment to the Rhode Island Constitution that would allow eligible Rhode Islanders to register to vote in the month preceding the election and on the day of the election. Greater publicity of a coming election in the final month and issues arising in the final month before an election can motivate eligible Rhode Islanders to seek to vote and their initiative should be supported. As you know, registration on election day is allowed for Presidential elections and has not caused a problem. Twenty-two states and D.C. allow same-day voter registration. Connecticut, Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire are among the states that allow same-day voter registration.

Many voters are denied the chance to vote because their registration is not up to date by the 30-day deadline. This particularly has an impact on renters, who move much more

often than homeowners.¹ Black citizens are almost twice as likely to rent as white citizens² and the 30-day deadline has an adverse impact on their opportunity to vote. The Hispanic home ownership rate is also significantly less than the white home ownership rate.³ Black voter turnout on average is 2-17% higher in states with same-day voter registration.⁴

The national statistics for the 2020 election illustrate the voting gap: “The 2020 election must also be remembered for another turnout statistic: 70.9 percent of white voters cast ballots while only 58.4 percent of nonwhite voters did.” Large Racial Turnout Gap Persisted in 2020 Election by Kevin Morris and Coryn Grange, Brennan Center for Justice, August 6, 2021. The gap persisted in the 2022 election: “Among racial groups, it is also surprising that Black and Latino or Hispanic Americans showed noticeably lower turnout rates in 2022 than in 2018, while white Americans’ turnout levels were similar.” New Voter Turnout Data from 2022 Shows Some Surprises, Including Lower Turnout for Youth, Women, and Black Americans in Some States by William H. Frey, Brookings Institution, May 18, 2023.

The voices of all Rhode Island citizens need to be heard. Because this resolution would provide greater opportunity for all Rhode Island voters to participate in our democracy, the Commission urges you to support H 5515.

Commission contact: Commissioner Cynthia Hiatt, 222-7563

¹ “Renters Are Three Times More Likely to Relocate Than Homeowners” M Report 8/22/23

² The Black home ownership rate is 44% while the white home ownership rate is 72.7% Hispanic home ownership rate is 50.6%. National Association of Realtors “More Americans Own Their Homes, but Black-White Homeownership Rate Gap is Biggest in a Decade, NAR Report Finds”, March 2, 2023.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “New Study Finds that States with Same Day Voter Registration Have Higher Black and Latinx Turnout” University of Massachusetts Amherst, June 29, 2021.