

Testimony on H 5515--Joint Resolution to Approve and Publish and Submit to the Electors a Proposition of Amendment to the Constitution--Of Suffrage

Position: Support

Common Cause Rhode Island strongly supports H 5515 that would put a proposed constitutional amendment on the November 2026 ballot that would pave the way for same day registration in Rhode Island.

This proposed amendment would remove the state's 30-day durational residency and registration deadlines from the state constitution. In their place, it would allow those deadlines to be set by an act of the General Assembly. It also creates a new constitutional 30-day durational residency requirement to run for office in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island is one of only four states, including Ohio, Oregon, and New York, which sets durational residency and registration deadlines in its state constitution. In all other states with voter registration systems (North Dakota does not have voter registration) the legislature sets those deadlines. We are seeking to add Rhode Island to the list of 46 states where the deadlines are set by the legislature.

Even though this proposal does not require same day registration, that is our goal. If this proposed constitutional amendment were to pass in November 2026 we would advocate for an enabling statute that would put in place a system of same day registration for all Rhode Island elections.

Rhode Island's 30-day registration deadline is the longest in the nation. It's the longest allowed under U.S. Supreme Court precedent. Only eight states have 30-day voter registration deadlines, and they include Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas; states with long histories of using voter registration to disenfranchise voters.

That stands in contrast to the 23 states and the District of Columbia that offer same day registration. Same day registration has consistently been shown to increase voter turnout, on average from three to seven percent in the states that have the policy. In Rhode Island that translates to tens of thousands of additional voters participating in our democracy.

All states with same day registration require voters to prove identity and residency. It can be implemented in a way that is safe and secure. While some states have had same day registration for almost a half century, adoption of a statewide voter registration database and the more recent adoption of electronic poll books has made it easier to implement.

Rhode Island is the only state that currently has election day registration for a presidential-vice presidential only ballot. Last November more than 9,000 Rhode Island voters used that system. Those are voters who live in Rhode Island and cannot vote in state and local elections. If Rhode Island were to adopt same day registration for all elections it would end that

two-tier election system that discriminates against voters who are not registered, or have not updated their registration.

Rhode Island election administrators have already shown they can run a system with same day registration. That is why Secretary of State Gregg Amore, the Rhode Island Board of Elections, and the Rhode Island Town and City Clerks Association all support H 5515 and same day voter registration.

Same day registration is popular in the states where it has been adopted. In recent years voters have rebuffed ballot initiatives in several states that sought to repeal same day registration. In a recent poll of Rhode Islanders conducted by the AFL-CIO, 54% expressed support for same day registration.

Rhode Island's history has been a long march toward greater enfranchisement; from the Dorr Rebellion that eliminated the real property requirement to 2006's Rhode Island Right to Vote Amendment that restored voting rights post-release. Rhode Island is ready for the next step in that process; same day voter registration. We urge the committee to pass H 5515 and put a constitutional amendment on the ballot this November that will start that process.

