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Written Testimony in Support of H. 5515
R.I. General Assembly House Committee on State Government & Elections
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Good afternoon, Chairman Shanley and Members of the Committee. Thank you for having me today. My name is Lily Mortenson, and I am a first-year student studying Biochemistry at Brown University and a member of the Advocacy Committee for the civic engagement organization Brown Votes. I'm here today to express my **strong support for H 5515**, a bill that would be instrumental in the fight for same-day voter registration.

I was raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a vibrant and politically active city where my family and community taught me the importance of advocacy, activism, and my civic duty to vote. This engaged environment ignited my passion for politics; it's why I've advocated for myriad bills at my state legislature, why I founded a club to protect my school's libraries against book bans, and why I'm here today, defending voter rights. The culture of democracy I was immersed in from a young age cultivated my commitment to political and social engagement and shaped who I am.

Though there are many factors contributing to the democratic zeal of Minneapolis and Minnesota as a whole, same-day registration, which the state implemented over 50 years ago¹, is its core. Same-day registration has been proven to increase voter turnout by an extraordinary 3% to 7%², and this is evident in the fact that Minnesota has consistently had the highest voter turnout in the nation³ and one of the highest youth turnout rates, at 36% in 2022⁴. The way same-day registration has strengthened democracy in MN has directly impacted my community, my upbringing, and my values.

But not everyone grew up in such an environment. Many people I met at Brown during last fall's election season had never voted before, were unsure how to navigate registration or absentee ballots, or were unable to do so due to missed deadlines. In Rhode Island, only 18% of eligible voters ages 18-29 voted in 2022. According to a study published by the University of Chicago Press Journals, a reason for this discrepancy could be the fact that "Young people are disproportionately burdened by traditional registration laws because they frequently change addresses and infrequently interact with government agencies providing registration services."¹ Thus eliminating restrictive registration deadlines is key to increasing youth voter turnout. In fact, the study found that same-day registration is *more* effective than early voting and other policies at increasing youth voter turnout¹.

I have experienced firsthand the benefits of same-day registration in my community at home, and seen the effects of its absence here in Rhode Island. At a time where the federal administration is attempting to eradicate the Department of Education, restrict our right to free speech on campus, and eliminate the DEI initiatives that protect marginalized students, it is ever more important that young people are given a voice and the chance to get engaged. I urge the Committee to make Rhode Island a democratic haven for the young people you serve and **vote in favor of H5515**.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://hamlineoracle.com/5762/news/a-minnesota-voters-guide-to-same-day-registration/>

² <https://doi.org/10.1086/714776>

³ https://ballotpedia.org/Voter_turnout_in_United_States_elections

⁴ <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/state-state-youth-voter-turnout-data-and-impact-election-laws-2022>