



**Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education Organizational Testimony in  
Support of Senate Bill #HB5515**

Mar 18, 2024

ARISE stands in full support of House Bill 5515, which champions the implementation of same-day voter registration in Rhode Island. Our endorsement of this bill is grounded in the belief that a healthy democracy flourishes when it is inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all its citizens.

In recent years, we have witnessed a troubling decline in young voter turnout, with the figures plummeting from 59% in 2020 to a mere 22% in 2022. The implementation of same-day voter registration presents a critical opportunity to reverse this downward spiral and reinvigorate the participation of Rhode Island's youth in our electoral process. Empirical evidence has shown that such measures can significantly boost turnout among young voters, potentially increasing participation by 3.1 to 7.3 percent, particularly marked during presidential elections.

This crisis is exacerbated by how antiquated and racially inequitable Rhode Island's voter registration policies are. Rhode Island's existing voter registration deadline stands as the most restrictive in the United States, disenfranchising recently naturalized U.S. citizens and residents who move between cities or towns. Moreover, in 2024, 2,311 Rhode Islanders registered after the arbitrary deadline and were consequently unable to vote in the general election. These figures starkly illustrate the barriers that our current system poses to voter participation, especially impacting Black, Latinx, and other communities of color who are nearly twice as likely to rent and move frequently.

House Bill 5515 seeks to dismantle these barriers by fostering a more equitable voting landscape and allowing newly naturalized citizens to participate immediately following their naturalization. Furthermore, our state already has the necessary infrastructure to support same-day registration, as demonstrated in 2024 when 9,187 people registered and voted on Election Day for the president and vice president—roles that federal law mandates must allow same-day registration.

Moreover, 61% of Rhode Islanders support same-day registration, signaling a clear mandate from the public for this legislative body to act. It is also worth noting that Rhode Island is an outlier in the New England region, where same-day voter registration is already a reality in four out of six states. The enactment of this bill would harmonize our state with a growing national trend that embraces electoral inclusivity, as 22 states plus the District of Columbia have already adopted same-day registration practices.

The merits of House Bill 5515 extend beyond enhancing voter turnout. It aims to eliminate arbitrary and onerous deadlines, improve the accuracy of voter lists, and alleviate the burden on election administrators by decreasing reliance on provisional ballots. By doing so, we can ensure that every eligible voter has the opportunity to register and cast a ballot that counts on election day.

In conclusion, ARISE urges the General Assembly to affirm Rhode Island's commitment to a vibrant democracy by passing House Bill 5515. Let us align with the values of inclusivity and representation by enabling same-day voter registration. Let us fortify the cornerstone of our democracy by empowering every citizen to participate in the electoral process. For Rhode Island, for democracy, for the future—we stand in solidarity with the passage of House Bill 5515.

Below are direct testimonies from our Youth Leaders, all of whom are high school seniors of color in Rhode Island:

"I support same day voter registration because I believe that voting should be accessible to demonstrate our commitment to democracy. Same day voting registration would allow for community members to participate in voting with increased convenience and is a standard across New England and many states throughout the US."

- Niyanta Nepal, Lead Organizer at ARISE

"I am in support of same day voter registration because it expedites the process for people to have the opportunity to vote after registering. When the process to vote is expedited, people are more inclined to vote and feel as though their vote is being counted. More voices are taken into account and our democracy flourishes because of same day voter registration!"

- Kasandra Kue, Lead Organizer at ARISE

"I support same day registration because everyone should have equitable access to be civically engaged. Same day registration will give more opportunities for people to participate in democracy on Election Day, even if they missed the chance to register to vote, resulting in more voter turnout and voices heard."

- Nancy Xiong, Program Manager at ARISE

“As a high school student looking ahead to my first chance to vote in the next election cycle, I strongly support Same Day Registration because it will make participation possible for many young people who might otherwise be left out. The complex rules around voter registration deadlines can be especially confusing for first-time voters, and many of my classmates and I worry about making mistakes that could prevent us from casting our ballots when the time comes. Same Day Registration would give us confidence that even if we encounter issues with our registration status, we’ll still have a path to making our voices heard on issues that will shape our futures.”

- Henry Iech, Senior, Pilgrim High School, Youth Leader at ARISE

“The Same Day Registration bill can fundamentally change how people perceive the process of voting. A more accessible system will encourage a drastic uptick in voter turnout, allowing voters the accessibility they need.”

- Oscar Kunk, Senior, St. Andrew’s, Youth Organizer at ARISE

"I support the same-day registration bill because it would lead to equality and support democracy. Voters who may not know to prioritize voting far enough in advance, especially new/younger voters, deserve the opportunity to participate in the democratic process that affects them. By implementing same-day voter registration, the state would thus provide accessibility and overall increase voter turnout."

- Leah Bae, Senior, Barrington High School, Youth Organizer at ARISE