

Summer Tullai
Civic Engagement Fellow, Brown Votes
Written Testimony in Support of H. 5515
R.I. General Assembly House Committee on State Government & Elections
March 18th, 2025

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman Shanley and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my voice. My name is Summer Tullai and I am a sophomore at Brown University studying Economics and International & Public Affairs. On campus, I serve as a Civic Engagement Fellow with Brown Votes, a nonpartisan, university-wide initiative committed to fostering democratic participation. I am here today to voice my strong **support for House Bill H. 5515** and to highlight the meaningful impact it could have on Rhode Islanders.

I was fortunate to grow up in a politically engaged family. Before my first election, my brother sent me a link to register to vote and request my absentee ballot. As a freshman, having this information readily available made the process seamless. However, over the past year, I have come to realize that my experience is not the norm. For many students, Rhode Island's restrictive registration deadlines create a significant barrier to voting.

During the presidential election last year, I spoke with dozens of students about their voting plans. While some opted to vote in their home state by absentee ballot, others felt more connected to Rhode Island's politics and local elections and wanted to vote here. Unfortunately, while some were able to register in time, others missed the deadline and could only cast a ballot for the presidential race—losing their chance to vote on the down-ballot issues that directly impact their lives.

One story that stuck with me was that of a student who is a dual citizen of the United States and another country. Having recently moved here, he was excited to participate in the democratic process for the first time. But when he tried to register to vote, he found out he had missed the registration deadline by just a few days. Despite being a U.S. citizen, he was unable to cast his ballot simply because of a bureaucratic timing issue. He was disappointed and felt excluded from a process that should have been his right as a citizen.

Same-day voter registration is a crucial step toward ensuring that no eligible voter is left out—whether they are lifelong Rhode Islanders, students, or new residents eager to engage in their communities. This bill isn't just about convenience; it's about fairness and inclusion. Voting is one of the most fundamental ways we shape our communities and our future. When we make it harder for people to vote, we don't just silence individuals—we weaken our democracy as a whole.

By passing H. 5515, Rhode Island can lead the way in creating a more inclusive and equitable voting system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.