



CITY OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND
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The Honorable Members of the House State Government & Elections Committee
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Support of House Bill 5516

Dear Chairman Shanley and Members of the House State Government & Elections Committee,

As the Election Administrator for the City of Newport and on behalf of Chairwoman Sharon Connors of the Newport Canvassing Authority, I am writing to encourage you to **support** passage of House Bill 5516, which would require the State Board of Elections to publish on its website a complete list of all write-in votes and publish the overall total number of write-ins for each particular office. It would also require local boards to adjudicate each individual write-in votes in races where the total number of write-in votes may affect the outcome for that particular office.

This bill is supported by unanimous votes of the Rhode Island Town and City Clerks' Association, the Rhode Island Board of Elections, the RI League of Cities and Towns, and the Newport Canvassing Authority, among other organizations and local election offices. Similar attempts to reform Rhode Island's highly irregular write-in tabulation requirements have previously passed the House of Representatives three times in recent years.

This bill would outline when local boards of canvassers are required to adjudicate write-in votes. Adjudicating refers to the process of reading the election tape from each precinct after the votes have been counted by the DS-200 voting machine on election night and tallying each write-in by precinct. Many write-ins are for fictional characters (Mickey Mouse), persons ineligible to hold the office they were written into (Tom Brady for Newport City Council for example), or are a vulgar obscenity. Tabulating these write-ins cuts into vital time post-election to meet other legal deadlines such as to adjudicate provisional ballots, to organize supplies and equipment for return to the Board of Elections and to process payroll for poll workers. Instead of requiring all write-ins be hand-tabulated, this bill would require tabulation only for declared write-in candidates, or in any race where there is no traditionally declared candidate on the

ballot, or in any race where the outcome could be affected by the addition of the write-in votes. As is current practice, all votes are still counted by the DS-200 voting machine and digital scans of all write-in votes would still be available to the public through the Board of Elections.

This bill does a good job balancing the public interest for ballot access and ensuring all votes are counted with critical write-ins being hand-tabulated against the strain election officials are under to comply with election administration deadlines. We therefore urge you to support it. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully submitted,



Hugh Moren
Election Administrator



Sharon Connors
Chair, Newport Canvassing Authority

CC: Sharon Connors
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