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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

**TESTIMONY ON 25-H 5516,
RELATING TO CONDUCT OF ELECTION
AND VOTING EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES
March 18, 2025**

The ACLU of Rhode Island opposes this bill, which would not require the individual counting of write-in votes unless the total number of write-ins could affect the outcome of the race.

While this version of the bill is different from previous years and no longer requires write-in candidates to register in advance in order to be counted, we continue to believe that this bill inappropriately minimizes the value of write-in votes. Voters should have the right to have their votes tallied, even for an obviously losing cause. A voter is making a statement by deciding to cast a write-in vote, regardless of whom that vote is for, and it should be respected, counted and noted.

We understand that write-ins are almost always futile and occasionally trivial, but individuals using this option are often attempting to make a point, and while the time spent tallying them may seem wasteful, it should be considered part of the process of recognizing the role of the franchise. We have all heard the mantra that in a democratic society, every vote counts. Yet passage of this bill would literally mean that every vote does *not* count.

The notion that these are “wasted” votes and therefore do not need to be counted is troubling. Electors routinely vote for independent and third-party candidates with the knowledge that there is no chance their candidate will win. Yet we count, and respect, those votes. The same should be true for write-in votes. Goals of efficiency should not be the basis for ignoring the choices that electors willingly and deliberately make in the polling booth.

For all these reasons, the ACLU opposes this legislation.