



STATE of RHODE ISLAND
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Legislative Impact Statement

To: Chairperson Representative Shanley
From: Elisabeth Hubbard, Executive Secretary
Re: 25 House 5711 AN ACT RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- MAIL BALLOTS

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

The Governor's Commission on Disabilities' Legislation Committee has developed a Legislative Impact Statement on the bill listed below. The Commission would be pleased to present testimony to the committee. Please contact me (462-0110) if testimony is desired or for additional information.

The Commission finds this harmful.

This bill would require verification of an applicant for a mail ballot's date of birth and either a Rhode Island driver's license or state identification number on all applications seeking mail ballots and emergency mail ballots.

The Commission finds this bill harmful, as it will create a barrier to voting for many people with disabilities.

Many people with disabilities have barriers in getting to the polls because of their disability, either because of transportation issues or health conditions. Mail ballots have been a method of accommodating these individuals. This bill would add a requirement of proof of a voter's date of birth and a state identification number.

Firstly, the bill does not say what method would be used to verify a person's date of birth. If it is a birth certificate, many people do not have access to their birth certificate. Obtaining a copy places an administrative burden on the individual and in Rhode Island costs \$22.

Secondly, the bill does not take into account that not all voters have a driver's license or state identification card. Many people with disabilities do not drive, so they do not have a driver's license. Many others who became unable to drive allowed their license to expire. Obtaining a state ID as an alternative is not a simple task. It requires a trip to the DMV, a copy of one's birth certificate, and two proof of Rhode Island residency. The examples of proof listed are utility bills, and not everyone has the utility bills in their name. (For example, if they live with a relative, in a group home, or in a nursing care facility.) For someone who is requesting a mail ballot because their disability prevents them from voting at a polling place, this is especially burdensome and often impossible. In addition, the fees required to obtain this documentation could be considered a poll tax, which has been found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections* 383 U.S. 663 (1966)

For these reasons, this bill should not be passed into law.