

Rhode Island*Holding Power Accountable***Testimony of Common Cause Rhode Island in Support of H 7787--An Act Relating to Elections--Mail Ballots****Position: Support**

Common Cause Rhode Island writes to express our support for H 7787 which would create a standalone section of Title 17 dedicated to early voting.

Common Cause Rhode Island first proposed legislation to create a true system of early voting in Rhode Island in 2012. We did this after our volunteers reported on significant lines at polling places in the 2012 election. We know that early voting provides a convenient option for voters to cast their ballot, takes stress off of polling places on Election Day, and allows election administrators to find, and correct, problems before Election Day. Our support for early voting has been validated by its popularity since it was adopted in 2020.

Rhode Island has early voting because of the COVID 19 pandemic. In order to take stress off the polling places the General Assembly amended the state's emergency mail ballot law to streamline that process by letting voters request a mail ballot using an electronic pollbook and casting that ballot directly into a tabulator. But even before the pandemic voters were expressing their desire to have choices in how they cast their ballots. Tens of thousands of voters were using the cumbersome emergency mail ballot process, putting considerable pressure on that system.

Early voting is popular. In the 2020 General Election 20 percent of Rhode Island voters used early voting and that increased to 33 percent in November 2024.

We urge the Committee to support H 7787.