



Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education

Organizational Testimony in Support of HB 8334

Apr 16, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE), we write in strong support of the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act (HB 8334).

ARISE is a youth-led organization working for education justice and community empowerment, particularly among Southeast Asian, BIPOC, and immigrant communities in Rhode Island. Our work centers youth leadership, civic engagement, and ensuring that communities most impacted by inequity have meaningful opportunities to shape the policies that affect their lives. Voting rights are foundational to this work.

For many of the young people and families we serve, participation in democracy is not guaranteed. Language barriers, voter intimidation, inaccessible systems, and discriminatory practices continue to prevent full participation — particularly for communities of color, immigrants, disabled voters, and LGBTQ+ communities. The Rhode Island Voting Rights Act addresses these barriers by prohibiting voter suppression and vote dilution, strengthening protections against voter intimidation, and ensuring language access for voters with limited English proficiency.

These protections are especially critical for Southeast Asian communities in Rhode Island, many of whom are refugees whose families came to the United States after experiencing war, displacement, and disenfranchisement. Access to voting is not just a civic responsibility — it is a deeply meaningful opportunity to participate in shaping safer, more equitable futures for their communities.

The Rhode Island Voting Rights Act also provides a private right of action, allowing individuals and organizations to defend their voting rights in state court, and includes a “democracy canon” to ensure laws are interpreted in the most pro-voter way possible. These tools are essential at a time when federal protections have been weakened and states must step forward to safeguard democratic participation.

At ARISE, we see firsthand how civic engagement transforms young people. When youth learn that their voices matter — whether through advocacy, testimony, or voting — they develop leadership skills and a deeper commitment to their communities. Ensuring equitable access to voting strengthens not only our democracy, but also the next generation of civic leaders.

Rhode Island has the opportunity to join other states that have enacted state-level Voting Rights Acts and demonstrate a commitment to inclusive democracy. Passing this legislation would affirm that Rhode Island values participation, representation, and fairness for all communities.

We respectfully urge the committee to pass the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act (HB 8334) and take an important step toward ensuring that our democracy truly reflects all Rhode Islanders.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE)