

House State Government and Elections Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
April 16, 2026

RE: SUPPORT FOR THE RHODE ISLAND VOTING RIGHTS ACT (H8334)

Dear Chair Shanley and Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee:

We write to express our support for the strongest possible version of the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act (“RIVRA”). The RIVRA will protect voters in Rhode Island against discrimination in voting and cement Rhode Island’s status as a national leader in voting rights. For these reasons, the undersigned organizations—several of which authored a model state voting rights act to serve as a template for state lawmakers seeking to safeguard voting rights in their own states—support the RIVRA.

By passing the strongest possible version of the RIVRA, Rhode Island has an opportunity to create a more equitable and inclusive democracy. Despite recent progress, voters of color, non-English speakers, and voters with disabilities in Rhode Island continue to face barriers to equal participation in our democracy. Rhode Island needs stronger protections to address discriminatory voting practices.

Federal law alone does not do enough to protect Rhode Island voters. Section 2 of the Federal Voting Rights Act (“VRA”) provides crucial protections against racial discrimination in voting, but these protections have been weakened by federal courts in recent years. In *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee*, for instance, the Supreme Court imposed new burdens on voters seeking to vindicate their voting rights in court under Section 2. Moreover, litigation under Section 2 can be expensive, time consuming, and complex. Now more than ever, we need state leaders to stand up for equal, inclusive democracy, and Rhode Island now has the opportunity to do just that.

The RIVRA draws heavily from a model voting rights act developed by five legal organizations with deep experience in both voting rights advocacy and litigation generally and the enactment, implementation, and enforcement of State VRAs, specifically: the Legal Defense Fund, Campaign Legal Center, Election Law Clinic at Harvard Law School, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, and Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF).

It will make Rhode Island’s democracy more inclusive by:

- Enshrining robust protections against voter suppression and vote dilution into state law.
- Providing efficient and practical ways to resolve barriers to equal participation in local democracy before litigation occurs.
- Expanding language assistance for voters with limited English proficiency.
- Prohibiting discrimination in voting based on factors such as sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or change in marital status.

- Launching a “preapproval” remedy that allows courts to hold local governments accountable for up to ten years following a voting rights violation.

The RIVRA builds upon successful state VRAs that have already passed in California, Washington, Oregon, Virginia, New York, Connecticut, Minnesota, Colorado, and Maryland. The New Jersey Assembly recently passed a similar bill, which is currently being considered by the Senate. The RIVRA will carry this momentum forward and provide some of the most robust state-level voting protections in the country.

Rhode Island can and should cement its role as a national leader in protecting the rights of voters. We urge you to support the strongest possible version of the RIVRA and we stand ready to work with you to secure these crucial protections for Rhode Island voters.

Sincerely,

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Campaign Legal Center
Dēmos
FairVote Action
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc.
Ocean State RCV