

Nihil Suthy
Advocacy Committee Chair of Brown Votes, Brown University
Written Testimony in Support of H-8334
Regarding the Senate State Government and Elections
4/16/2026

Good evening Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Nihil Suthy, a third-year student at Brown University studying Computational Biology and one of the Advocacy Chairs of Brown Votes, a nonpartisan university initiative committed to fostering democratic participation. I have written this testimony **in support of bill H-8334**, which would protect fundamental voting rights that have been instated in this nation since 1965.

One of the most important rights guaranteed in this nation is the ability for citizens to vote in elections. However, despite promising to protect us more than sixty years ago, the Supreme Court has slowly been stripping away from the Federal Voting Rights Act, making it necessary for states to pass their own renditions of the Voting Rights Act to protect their citizens. Since 2002, nine states have passed voting rights legislation, with states such as Colorado enacting their version of the bill as recently as last year. I see no reason as to why Rhode Island can't be the tenth state to pass a Voting Rights Act.

In a state as diverse as Rhode Island, you can find different languages being spoken at every corner you turn. From Portuguese to Khmer, our state is home to communities across the globe. Given this diversity, it would be expected that the state would try and make voting as easy as possible for these different groups of people. As of right now, the state mandates ballots to be in a specific language *only* if there are more than ten thousand citizens of voting age in a city or town. Many towns in the state don't even have ten thousand residents. How is this fair to the people that live here? By changing the percentage to 5% of a town's population and 1% for areas with a Native American population, the RI VRA would protect and promote the voices of our state's minority groups to be heard.

The RI VRA even goes one step further to protect individual voters. The bill specifically lists different minority groups that would be classified as "protected groups," and most notably, if passed, the RI VRA would be the first state VRA to protect people of different sexual orientations and gender identities, putting us at the forefront of LGBTQ rights. The bill also prohibits efforts to restrict access to voting, such as vote suppression and vote dilution. As a resident from Michigan, I know how borders can be used as political tools, with state district maps being drawn and redrawn again and again until 2022. If the RI VRA were to pass, it would ban such practices, preventing either side from gaining an unfair advantage.

Voting is one of our greatest civic responsibilities, and by passing this bill, you would be giving everyone in Rhode Island a fair opportunity to make their voices heard. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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