



April 13, 2026
The Honorable Representative Evan P. Shanley, Chair
House State Government and Elections Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence RI 02903

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 8334 –
AN ACT RELATING TO ELECTIONS – RHODE ISLAND VOTING RIGHTS ACT**

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

On behalf of United Way Rhode Island, we strongly support H 8334, which creates the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act to establish procedures to prevent discrimination in the voting process. United Way's policy and advocacy efforts follow our strategic framework: **Strong Families, Strong Nonprofits, Strong United Way**. We prioritize policies that strengthen household stability, expand access to opportunity, and ensure public investments deliver measurable value. Civic participation is the foundation of a healthy democracy and a resilient Rhode Island, and United Way Rhode Island is committed to advancing legislation that dismantles barriers to participation and ensures that immigrant, BIPOC, multilingual, youth, rural, and ALICE households (those where members of the household are working, yet find themselves priced out of stability by the high cost of living) have equal power in shaping the state's future.

The Rhode Island Voting Rights Act is a direct, measured response to active threats to Rhode Island voters at the polls. As a funder of voter registration, voter education, and civic engagement organizations and projects, United Way of Rhode Island's practices have been impacted by voter safety concerns. In our mission to increase voter turnout in underrepresented communities, we have had hard conversations with community partners about how a decision to go to the polls can put a neighbor at risk. Grantmaking decisions around election season will be impacted again this year unless we can affirm Rhode Islanders' right to vote.

In 2024, 1,734 callers to 211 received information about their elections, and they were able to receive accurate information and timely referrals because of the close partnership between United Way Rhode Island and the Secretary of State's office. The inclusion of voters with a disability, voters with limited English proficiency, and voters who are members of any race, color, or language-minority supports the 211 representatives' ability to give callers the assurance they need to participate in elections, and that they will be able to do so safely.

United Way Rhode Island respectfully urges your support for House Bill 8334 and thanks you for sharing our commitment to strong voter protections that translate to safe, **Strong Families**.

Sincerely,
Peggy Afonso, Program Officer, Housing and Economic Policy, United Way Rhode Island