

April 16, 2026

The Honorable Chair Evan Shanley
Chair, House Committee on State Government & Elections
RI State House

Re: Support for H8334 - The RI Voting Rights Act

Dear Chair Shanley:

My name is Tara Hayes, and I am a Rhode Island mom and caregiver to a medically fragile young adult who recently turned 18.

Like every parent, I remember the day my child was born and the hopes I carried for their future. I could not envision that adulthood would come with so many barriers—or that something as fundamental as voting would be one of them. When my child turned 18, he became an adult in the eyes of the law, with the right to vote and to have his voice heard. But as a parent and caregiver, I know that having the right to vote and being able to exercise that right is not the same thing.

My child has complex medical needs. He relies on support to communicate, travel, and perform all activities of daily life. On election days, unpredictable health issues, transportation hurdles, inaccessible polling places, and a lack of clear, consistent accommodations can turn voting into an exhausting, stressful, or impossible task. These barriers don't erase my child's opinions, values, or stake in the community—but too often they erase their participation.

That is why I strongly support the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act.

This bill recognizes something families like mine know all too well: discrimination in voting doesn't only happen through outright denial. It happens when systems are designed without disabled people in mind, when assistance is unclear or inconsistently offered, or when voters are made to feel like a burden for needing help. As a parent, I worry not just about access, but about dignity. No one should feel intimidated, rushed, questioned, or embarrassed for needing assistance to vote.

I am especially grateful that this Act explicitly protects disabled voters' rights to receive assistance of their choice and strengthens safeguards against voter suppression and intimidation. These protections matter deeply to families navigating guardianship questions, supported decision-making, and the transition to adult services. Turning 18 is already a complicated milestone for medically fragile young adults; we should not make civic participation another hurdle filled with uncertainty or fear.

The Rhode Island Voting Rights Act sends a clear message: our democracy works best when everyone can participate fully, including people with disabilities and complex medical needs. It shifts the burden away from individual voters having to fight for accommodations and place it where it belongs—on our systems, to be fair, inclusive, and just.

As a mom, I want my child to grow into adulthood knowing that their voice matters, that their community expects their participation, and that our state values them not in spite of their disability, but as a full citizen. Passing the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act brings us closer to that reality.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill. Thank you for listening and for your commitment to protecting the rights of all Rhode Islanders.

/s/

Tara Hayes
276 Shamrock Dr.
Warwick, RI 02886
Taramichelle79@verizon.net