

April 7, 2026

Senate Committee on Judiciary  
State of Rhode Island  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair LaMountain and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Amy Abajian, and I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of Senate Bill S3143, the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act.

In my professional role serving youth and families in Pawtucket, I regularly work with individuals for whom English is not their first language. Many of these families are engaged in their communities, yet face barriers when accessing civic processes, including voting.

In 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice brought a lawsuit against the City of Pawtucket for failing to provide adequate Spanish-language voting materials and assistance, as required under federal law. The resulting consent decree mandated bilingual materials and highlights how gaps in local implementation can limit access to the ballot.

Senate Bill S3143 addresses this by establishing clear, statewide standards for voter access. It strengthens language access by requiring translated materials and assistance based on community need, not just federal population thresholds. This helps ensure voters are not excluded due to technical cutoffs.

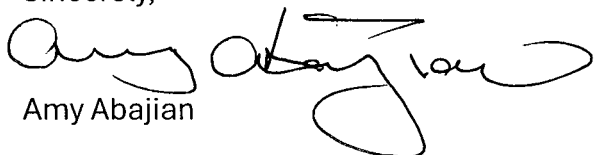
The bill also reinforces equitable access across race, language, and gender. As a participant in the Women's Policy Institute, I recognize the importance of ensuring systems reflect and protect all identities. This is especially important as federal protections related to gender identity become more limited. State-level protections help ensure all voters can participate safely and without barriers.

Several states have adopted their own Voting Rights Acts to strengthen access and accountability. In neighboring Connecticut, expanded access measures, including early voting, resulted in tens of thousands of residents participating in its first implementation. This demonstrates how state policy can increase participation and improve consistency across municipalities.

Senate Bill S3143 ensures eligible voters can access the ballot without unnecessary barriers. I respectfully urge the Committee to support this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Amy Abajian