
In-Support of S3143

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To Senate Judiciary Committee <SenateJudiciary@rilegislature.onmicrosoft.com>

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Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Melanie Griffith, and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act.

At a moment when voting rights are under renewed and serious threat nationwide, Rhode Island has an opportunity—and an obligation—to act. Across the country, federal proposals and state-level restrictions are increasingly targeting voters through burdensome identification requirements, documentary proof of citizenship demands, and administrative barriers that fall hardest on people whose current legal name may not match older records or underlying documents. These policies do not protect democracy; they exclude eligible voters from it.

That is especially true for women and anyone who has changed their name.

Millions of women change their name due to marriage or divorce. Survivors of domestic violence may change their name for safety. Transgender and nonbinary people may change their name to align with who they are. Adopted people, immigrants, religious converts, and many others may also have perfectly lawful, legitimate name changes that can create discrepancies across identification documents, voter rolls, and other records. When the law assumes that every eligible voter has perfectly matching paperwork across every system, it is not creating election integrity—it is creating disenfranchisement.

We are already seeing how these kinds of mismatches are being weaponized in national debates over voting. Federal legislation and related policy proposals that require rigid documentary proof or exact name matching would disproportionately burden voters who have changed their names, even when they are unquestionably eligible to vote. In practice, this means many women could be forced to navigate confusing bureaucratic hurdles simply to exercise a fundamental constitutional right. It means transgender Rhode Islanders could face additional scrutiny, exposure, or denial at the polls. It means survivors could be put in the impossible position of choosing between their privacy and their vote.

The Rhode Island Voting Rights Act is so important because it creates a state-level framework that protects access, fairness, and accountability before these harms deepen. Rhode Island should ensure that our election system works for real people with real lives—not just for those whose paperwork has remained unchanged forever.

The right to vote must not depend on whether someone got married, got divorced, fled abuse, transitioned, or changed their name for any lawful reason. Those are not reasons to lose access to

democracy. They are reasons to strengthen our protections.

I urge the Committee to pass the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act and to affirm clearly that in Rhode Island, our democracy belongs to all eligible voters—not only those whose documents happen to align neatly across every database.

Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to protecting the freedom to vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Melanie Griffith

Member of the Women's Policy Institute, 2025-2026