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Chair LaMountain
Senate Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence RI

RE: Support for S-3143 (Rhode Island Voting Rights Act).

Chair LaMountain and Esteemed Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

In the run-up to the passage of the Reproductive Privacy Act that codified Roe v. Wade into state law in 2019, advocates faced an uphill battle primarily against complacency. Time and time again we heard that Roe v. Wade already secured at the federal level what we were trying to protect here in Rhode Island – that there was no need, that our concerns were overblown. Then the Dobbs decision came down just three years later, overturning Roe v. Wade and proving that we had acted just in time.

Hindsight is 20/20.

Let's not test the sense of security around our most fundamental democratic rights.

In such perilous times for our democracy, it is essential that the General Assembly act to safeguard our voting rights. The bill before you, presented by Secretary of State Amore with the full support of Common Cause RI and the sponsorship of Senate President Lawson, aims to be that shield for Rhode Island voters. It will give the Secretary of State, Attorney General, and other stakeholders the tools they need to ensure that eligible Rhode Island voters are able to exercise their constitutional right to vote.

This cannot be kicked down the road to the next legislative session. We need the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act this year. For that reason, I strongly urge the committee to propose an amendment making this legislation effective on passage (with provisions for later implementation of the heavier-lift components of the bill, as recommended by the Campaign Legal Center), rather than on its current Effective Date of January 1, 2027. As a campaign professional, one of the chief concerns I am hearing from voters already is around voter intimidation at the polls. I see no reason at all why that component should wait until next calendar year rather than going into effect before the upcoming elections in the fall.

Committee members, please take heed of the urgency surrounding this bill. There is no time to waste. Send this bill to the floor for a vote.

Respectfully,
Sydney Keen
Policy Fellow, Women's Policy Institute