

Memo To: Senate Judiciary Committee  
From: Angela Lima, Chief of Government Relations  
Date: Apr 6, 2026  
Regards: Support for Bills S-3143

We are expressing our strong **support for Rhode Island Senate Bill S-3143, which is a proposal to create a state-level Voting Rights Act. At a high level, it's designed to prevent discrimination in elections and strengthen protections beyond federal law.**

Rhode Island has long prided itself on civic participation and fair representation, yet persistent barriers continue to limit equal access to the ballot for many communities. Passing a Rhode Island Voting Rights Act is a necessary and timely step to ensure that every eligible voter—regardless of race, language, income, or neighborhood—can fully participate in our democracy.

A state-level Voting Rights Act would provide critical protections that respond to modern challenges in voting access. The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 was one of the most effective civil rights laws in U.S. history, particularly through its “preclearance” provision, which required jurisdictions with histories of discrimination to obtain federal approval before changing voting laws. This proactive safeguard prevented discriminatory policies before they could take effect and significantly expanded access to the ballot for communities of color.

However, in 2013, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* effectively eliminated the preclearance system, removing a key protection against discriminatory voting changes. In the years since, research shows that states have enacted dozens of new restrictive voting laws that previously would have been subject to federal review, underscoring the need for renewed protections at the state level.

State-level Voting Rights Acts have emerged as a proven solution. Across the country, states have adopted their own voting rights frameworks to prevent discrimination, strengthen transparency, and protect against vote dilution. These laws often include provisions such as preclearance for certain jurisdictions, expanded language access, and stronger enforcement mechanisms—tools specifically designed to address gaps left by weakened federal oversight.

Key provisions of a Rhode Island Voting Rights Act would strengthen transparency, accountability, and fairness in elections. These include requiring preclearance for changes to voting laws in areas with demonstrated risk of discrimination, expanding language access for voters with limited English proficiency, ensuring equitable distribution of polling places and resources, and protecting against practices that dilute the voting strength of communities of color. Research has shown that policies like preclearance not only prevent

discrimination but also improve political representation and accountability in affected communities.

Importantly, such legislation would not advantage one political party over another—it would simply ensure that the rules of our democracy are fair, inclusive, and consistently applied. When more people can participate freely and confidently in elections, public trust in government grows, and outcomes better reflect the will of the people.

Rhode Island has an opportunity to affirm its commitment to democratic values by passing a strong Voting Rights Act. Doing so would align the state with a growing national movement to protect voting access and would ensure that the right to vote is not only guaranteed in principle, but protected in practice.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the passage of the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act.