



**Testimony in SUPPORT of H-7100 - THE LET RI VOTE ACT AND
SUPPORT of H-7225 SAME DAY REGISTRATION**

From: Angela McCalla, Policy and Advocacy Program Director, Women's Fund of RI

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RE: The Let RI Vote Act (S7100) & Joint & Resolution on Persons Entitled to Vote (S7225)

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

The Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research, grant-making, and strategic partnerships designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. The ability to vote in a safe and secure manner, as well as same day voter registration, has a direct impact on women and people of color in our state.

We are pleased to submit testimony in support of H-7100, which would codify the expanded options for safe voting that were enacted temporarily during the 2020 elections due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while protecting the integrity of the voting process. An ongoing challenge for any election is the ability for a registered voter to get to the polls.

We are also equally supportive of H-7225, which allows same day voter registration options for qualified Rhode Islanders. This already exists for Presidential elections, but for all local elections, Rhode Island requires a 30 day voter registration window. This requirement makes us an outlier in New England, when VT, ME, NH and CT allow same day voter registration for all elections. In fact, 22 states in the nation allow this.

Currently, state law limits voters to one day to vote "in person." Voters who elect to mail in their ballots must have them witnessed and notarized, which puts unnecessary burdens on the voter to find witnesses and possibly pay for a notary, when signatures on ballots can now be verified by the Secretary of State's office.

There are many reasons why potential voters can't vote in person on election day. Challenges include lack of transportation, emergencies, health, and family obligations. For people who don't control their schedules, like many in the retail, hospitality, and human service sector, they often do not know if they will be working on election day until it is too late to request a mail ballot and then find witnesses and notaries.

These bills makes voting more equitable and accessible for all registered voters. It will:

- Require the Secretary of State to update the voter files 4x each year

- Eliminate the witness/notary requirement to vote by mail
- Extends the deadline for voters to request a Braille ballot
- Establishes a dedicated Multilingual Voter Information Hotline
- Allows registered voters to request a mail ballot online
- Allows residents of nursing homes to opt-in to automatically receive ballot applications
- Allows for no-excuse voting by mail or early in-person
- Establishes secure ballot dropboxes
- Allows voters to register the same day

These provisions make our elections more secure while giving Rhode Islanders safe, expanded access and opportunity to vote. We saw these policies work effectively in 2020, without any significant instances of fraud taking place. ***The Women's Fund of Rhode Island urges our legislators to pass these important bills into law.***