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ACLU OF RI POSITION: OPPOSE

TESTIMONY ON 24-H 7071, AN ACT RELATING TO ELECTIONS – MAIL BALLOTS January 23, 2024

Perhaps one of the few positive effects of the ongoing impact from the COVID-19 pandemic is the spotlight that this crisis shone on the right to vote and the need for modern, updated, and, critically, accessible methods of exercising the franchise. Rhode Island rapidly responded to this need and in the last few years has made strides in ensuring that the ability to vote in our state is more robust than it has been before. For these reasons we oppose this legislation, H-7071, which would pare back the amount of time that voters currently have to early vote, chipping away at an important component of voter accessibility to the polls.

Currently, Rhode Island voters may vote early during the twenty days preceding Election Day; this legislation would shorten that time frame to fourteen days. The benefits to this twenty-day early voting period are expansive and ensure ample opportunity for all registered voters to cast their vote, especially with the complications of work schedules, child care, and the many responsibilities that all adults must navigate. Many voters have utilized the early voting process in the short period of time it has been available, clearly demonstrating its utility.

While some opponents have expressed concern about intervening events that can occur between the casting of an early vote and the day of the election, the decision to vote in this manner is purely voluntary and should be accepted, just as we accept individuals voting early by mail ballot.

Because this legislation would only decrease access to voting that has only recently been expanded to all Rhode Island voters, we oppose this legislation. Thank you for your consideration.