



State of Rhode Island

Department of State | Office of the Secretary of State

Gregg M. Amore, *Secretary of State*

January 23, 2024

Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair
House Committee on State Government and Elections

RE: H7071 - An Act Relating to Elections – Mail Ballots

Dear Chair Shanley,

I write this letter with concerns regarding H7071, legislation that will remove early voting from the mail ballot section of Title 17 of the General Laws while creating a separate early voting statute and reducing early voting to 14 days.

Although the Department of State supports removing the early voting statute from the mail ballot statute, we disagree on shortening the early voting period from 20 to 14 days. This will be the first post-COVID presidential election where we expect early voting numbers to be higher than ever before; therefore, we recommend we see how the 2024 election unfolds before making any decisions affecting the early voting timeline.

Over the last two election cycles, Rhode Island voters have been accustomed to voting starting on the 20th day before an election. Reducing early voting to 14 days will cause confusion among voters during such a critical election year.

Moreover, reducing early voting would leave a gap between the mail ballot deadline, 21 days before an election, and the start of early voting, 14 days before an election. The 7 days in between signifies that voters' only option is to vote through an emergency mail ballot. This process will be more time-consuming and require extra paperwork for both voters and local boards of canvassers.

Additionally, we suggest that the term "poll pads" should instead be "electronic poll books, as the term "poll pad" is a specific term used with our current vendor. Making this technical change would ensure that the term used in the legislation remains current regardless of the vendor the State utilizes.

Nevertheless, we are happy to work with Representative Brien and this Committee on suggested amendments to this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Michelle Arias, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, at marias@sos.ri.gov.

Sincerely,

Gregg M. Amore
Secretary of State

cc: Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections
Honorable Jon Brien