

Dear Chair Shanley, First Vice Chair Messier, Second Vice Chair Corvese, and Honorable Members of the Committee on State Government and Elections:

My name is Michael Garman, and I am a lifelong resident of Newport. I am writing in strong opposition to House Bill 7071.

Early voting is a crucial voting access measure, particularly for students like me who attend out-of-state universities. The three-week early window allows me to vote in-person in primary elections -- and, as we all know, most Rhode Island elections are decided in the Democratic primary -- before leaving for the start of the semester. A two-week timeframe would not permit that. I'd be forced to vote by mail, which could pose logistical challenges at the start of the school year, as I (and many other students) do not have established mailing addresses until we are on campus and have opened P.O. Boxes. Representative Brien's proposed change would suppress the votes of Rhode Island's youngest voters.

One of the main arguments made by proponents of shrinking the early voting period is that it would help prevent a repeat of the situation that occurred in last year's special congressional election, when candidate Don Carlson dropped out after early voting had begun and over a hundred citizens had already cast their ballots for him. I agree: we must have safeguards in place for such situations! The answer, though, is not to reduce early voting and diminish voter participation. Rather, we should implement ranked choice voting for primaries. If a voter's first choice candidate leaves the race, their vote will still count for their second favorite, rather than being wasted, as were Carlson's voters. We should use his situation as inspiration to strengthen our democracy rather than weaken it.

In closing, I urge you to oppose House Bill 7071.

Sincerely,
Michael Garman
Newport