

**Kirk McDonough**  
*Chairperson*

**Nicholas J. Lima**  
*Registrar / Director of Elections*



**Quilcia I. Moronta**  
*Member*

**James E. Donahue**  
*Member*

**CRANSTON BOARD OF CANVASSERS**  
**869 PARK AVE**  
**CRANSTON, RI 02910-2786**

March 25, 2024

The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02903

**RE: Cranston Board of Canvassers Support for H-7664 (Signature Review and Election Deadlines)**

Dear Chairman Shanley and Hon. Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Cranston Board of Canvassers to request the support for **H-7664**, an act that would reform and make significant improvements to our election system by providing more time and better procedures for the review of candidate nomination papers, as well as moving the Statewide Primary Election to August beginning in 2026. This bill is supported by a vote of both the Rhode Island Town and City Clerks' Association and the Rhode Island Board of Elections, and by the Secretary of State, among other organizations.

**H-7664** is long overdue. In 2009, Congress passed the MOVE Act, which requires states to send out mail ballots to overseas and military voters at least 45 days prior to the General Election. In response, nearly every state in the country moved their primary back – but Rhode Island has not yet done so. The state is now in perennial danger of failing to comply with this federal law, which would trigger a lawsuit from the Justice Department. As it stands, our September Statewide Primary is held so close to this deadline that there is insufficient time to conduct proper recounts and post-primary certification, such as risk-limiting audits. Furthermore, the important processes of designing, proofing, and printing ballots for the November election must be rushed and accelerated, which can substantially increase the propensity for errors that would compromise the election.

Another significant problem caused by Rhode Island's **latest-in-the-nation September Primary** is the turnaround of voting equipment. After the primary date, it takes weeks for voting machines, ballot boxes, and accessible ballot marking devices to be picked up at hundreds of polling locations by the BOE, inventoried, cleaned up, retested, reprogrammed, and re-certified – not to mention an even faster turnaround for early voting in mid-October. It then takes weeks more to deliver this equipment back out to over 400 polls for the General Election and early voting sites. It is imperative that this equipment is properly tested and certified, and that the process not be rushed.

However, because of early voting starting 20 days before the General, that equipment must be ready for delivery only days after the final ballot is certified, and the remaining equipment for Election Day must likewise begin delivery shortly thereafter. This causes state election administrators to scramble working with seasonal staff to get this equipment ready in time, with no margin for error. While election officials have continued to do phenomenal work to make this process happen accurately and efficiently, it is a system set up for error and that should be modified.

Local boards also have significant deadlines to meet in the days following the September primary, not the least of which is processing a backlog of thousands of frozen voter registrations from the 30-day period leading up to the primary. Long hours and work on weekends are often necessary just to catch up on this backlog, not to mention

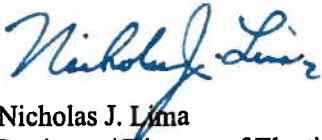
the myriad other time-sensitive duties local boards must perform in September and early October, ranging from proofing ballots to generating referenda mailers and required election ads to recruiting and training poll workers. Having just an extra two weeks to spread out these critical, complex tasks would make a world of difference.

Finally, recent discrepancies – including possible fraudulent activity – in candidate nomination papers have made it abundantly apparent that the signature review process is due for an overhaul. State and local election officials should have more time to conduct investigations and hear challenges to signatures, as rushing such an important process as determining candidate eligibility is inherently unwise. This bill would expand the timeline for that process, and add new protections and procedures for when irregularities are identified to ensure a uniform process that is held to the utmost standards of integrity.

Local election officials likewise sincerely appreciate this bill's language that incorporates designated representatives from the Rhode Island Town and City Clerks' Association, the state's only association of election officials, into the process to provide valuable input and local knowledge for when the state Board of Elections promulgates rules and regulations related to the signature verification and certification process.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill. If you have any questions on this legislation, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at 401-780-3128, or via email at [nlima@cranstonri.gov](mailto:nlima@cranstonri.gov).

Very truly yours,



Nicholas J. Lima  
Registrar / Director of Elections

Cc: Kirk McDonough, Chairperson, Cranston Board of Canvassers