

## Testimony on H 7849--An Act Relating to Elections--Mail Ballots

### Position: Support

Common Cause Rhode Island supports H 7849 which allows election officials to open mail ballot drop boxes, in most instances, up to 35 days prior to an election.

Since 2011 Rhode Island has gradually made it easier for eligible voters to qualify to vote by mail. The result has been a larger percentage of voters choosing to vote by mail. With that a new problem has arisen; voters who receive their mail ballots before the statutory date for opening drop boxes.

Under current law, local boards of canvassers at the direction of the state Board of Elections can only open a mail ballot drop box 20 days prior to an election. That is despite the fact that many voters receive their mail ballots more than 20 days prior to an election. Currently a voter who wants to return their mail ballot more than 20 days prior to an election must use the USPS, return the ballot in person to their local board of canvassers, or wait until the drop boxes become available.

This legislation also solves the problem of what happens if there is an election within 35 days of another election. It creates a protocol for closing the drop box at 8 pm on the night of the election and taking possession of voted mail ballots, then opening the drop box for the next election the following morning.

Drop boxes are an important part of an accessible and secure vote by mail system. We should make them available to voters when needed. That is why we urge the committee to support H 7849.