



State of Rhode Island COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

180 Westminster Street, Providence, RI 02903 – Tel. 401-222-2661

TESTIMONY

BILL NO.: 2024 H 7850
BILL TITLE: Act Relating to Elections – Mail Ballots
PRIMARY SPONSORS: Representative P. Morgan
COMMITTEE: House State Government & Elections

The Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights (“Commission”) **opposes** this bill.

The Commission is the state’s primary antidiscrimination law enforcement agency charged with investigating allegations of discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit and delivery of services. Among the allegations investigated by the Commission are those of race, ancestral origin, age and disability discrimination in employment and housing. **The Commission believes that passage of this bill would discourage voting by ethnic minorities, the elderly, people with disabilities and those who are poor.**

This bill would restrict the circumstances in which a citizen could request a mail ballot, make the process for requesting a mail ballot harder and require that almost all mail ballots be signed before a notary public or two witnesses. In summary, H 7850 makes it harder to vote.

Poor individuals and working poor people with multiple jobs (many of whom are ethnic minorities), as well as people who are elderly and/or who have disabilities, may give up their right to vote when faced with the practical difficulties of complying with the restrictions in this bill. The voices of all Rhode Island citizens need to be heard. Barriers to voting, particularly when faced by the state’s most vulnerable populations, are intolerable.

The Commission urges that the Committee not pass this bill.

Commission contact: Commissioner Cynthia Hiatt, 222-7563