

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-7859 (35 Days for Mail Ballot Drop Boxes)

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 of the House for **H-7859**, an act that would allow mail ballot drop boxes to be opened at City and Town Halls 35 days prior to statewide and federal elections. 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. **I will note that both legislative chambers overwhelmingly voted in support of a similar bill in 2023.**

H-7859 simply clarifies in state law that the mail ballot drop boxes at city and town halls (among other designated locations) may be opened 35 days prior to Election Day, rather than 20. Prior to passage of the Let RI Vote Act in 2022, mail ballot drop boxes **were** opened by local election offices more than 30 days prior to the election. This makes sense: that way, the drop boxes can be utilized for deposit of mail ballots, which are sent out by the Secretary of State more than 20 days prior in most circumstances, as well as for mail ballot applications – which are due 21 days prior – and for voter registrations – which are due 30 days prior.

Local election offices are already receiving mail ballots over our counters and in unregulated municipal drop boxes since ballots are received by voters prior to 21 days before an election – **this bill adds an important security measure because state drop boxes are much better regulated.** We fielded numerous angry calls from voters in 2022 and 2023 who found our City Hall box locked during this time period. With extensive security controls and 24/7 video surveillance, there is no reason the box cannot be unlocked prior to 20 days – the box is there for voter convenience to use during or after business hours, and should be opened and utilized accordingly. It's nonsensical for the box to be closed, and for voters to arrive to submit their sealed mail ballot, mail ballot application, or voter registration form, only to find it locked.

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.

Very truly yours,

Nicholas J. Lima
Registrar / Director of Elections

Cc: Kirk McDonough, Chairperson, Cranston Board of Canvassers