



State of Rhode Island

Department of State | Office of the Secretary of State

Gregg M. Amore, *Secretary of State*

March 26, 2024

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair
House Committee on State Government and Elections

RE: H8046 - An Act Relating to Elections – General Provisions

Dear Chair Shanley,

I write this letter in support of House Bill 8046, legislation that would allow municipalities to permit their citizens who are at least sixteen years of age to vote in school committee elections.

As a former history and civics teacher for over thirty years, I know how crucial it is to educate our students on both our history and how to participate in our democracy. Under my administration, we have expanded the scope of our civic education program by establishing partnerships with middle and high schools across the state, including classroom visits, mock elections, and our Civic Liaison Program for students.

Our goal with these programs is to encourage greater civic engagement from our youth. We believe all young people deserve meaningful civic engagement opportunities that provide them with an array of civic knowledge, skills, and experiences. A study from the Tufts Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement shows that the earlier high school youth are engaged in democratic processes, the higher the likelihood that they will remain civically engaged later in life.

Ultimately, we believe that our youth should be directly engaged in their communities and in the democratic systems and structures that govern them so that they become lifelong citizens and active participants in our democracy.

We do have some concerns with ballot preparation and implementation at the municipal level if this legislation passes and a municipality decides to allow 16-year-olds to vote in School Committee elections. In other jurisdictions where this law has been implemented, municipalities administer their elections differently than in Rhode Island. Nevertheless, the Elections team at the Department of State is happy to work with the bill sponsor on strategies to address these implementation issues.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Michelle Arias, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, at marias@sos.ri.gov.

Sincerely,

Gregg M. Amore
Secretary of State, State of Rhode Island

Cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections
The Honorable Leonela Felix

State House, Room 218, Providence, RI 02903

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