



State of Rhode Island

Department of State | Office of the Secretary of State

Gregg M. Amore, Secretary of State

February 27, 2025

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

RE: H5521 – An Act Relating to General Assembly – Redistricting Commission

Dear Chair Shanley,

I write this letter on House Bill 5521, legislation that will establish a redistricting commission to propose district plans.

As Secretary of State, one of my top priorities has been to make government more transparent and accessible for all Rhode Islanders to encourage civic engagement. I strongly support initiatives to create an independent redistricting commission in our state to draw fair districts and prevent gerrymandering.

In order to maintain accurate information on voter districts in the Central Voter Registration System (CVRS), the Department of State relies on redistricting work accomplished at the state level, as well as the work of cities and towns. In the current redistricting process and in the process that would occur with the passage of this legislation, cities and towns rely on the district plans/maps adopted by the General Assembly, and within this proposed legislation.

As outlined in RIGL §§ 22-1-2 and 22-2-2 the Secretary of State:

“shall keep a copy [...] of maps and a copy of the census tract and block listing [...] and shall furnish each city and town a copy of the town map”.

In order to comply with the law, the Department of State suggests this legislation requires the commission to share geospatial data files relating to the updated Congressional, Senate, and House boundaries with our office, as well as Census Block Equivalency files for each district. Our office partners with cities and towns to help with redistricting and reprecincting. Having these geospatial and data files helps to ensure voters are electing candidates for which they are eligible to vote for. Local boards of canvassers also depend on this geospatial data to select polling places and contact voters with voting information.

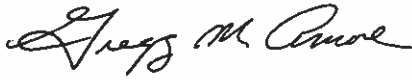
For this reason, we recommend that this legislation include language under RIGL §§ 22-1-2(3)(ii) and 22-2-2(3)(ii) that would codify that the Department of State be sent the updated Census Block Equivalency files and geospatial files from the redistricting commission or its consultants within a reasonable timeframe.

Additionally, if this bill were to pass, we would suggest careful consideration of its impact on the timeline within the redistricting process. Specifically, with the judicial review provision within this bill, any delay in the ruling of appeals against a district plan adopted by the commission or “debate” within the General Assembly could delay the subsequent steps in the redistricting process for cities and towns and the Department of State. Once again, a delay has the risk of preventing communities from having adequate time to select polling places and to share information with voters on where and how to vote.

We appreciate this Committee's and the sponsor's consideration of our suggestions above, as we believe they will enhance the redistricting process as proposed in House Bill 5521.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gregg M. Amore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gregg" being the most prominent.

Gregg M. Amore
Secretary of State

cc: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on State Government and Elections
The Honorable Brian Newberry