

Kirk McDonough
Chairperson

Nicholas J. Lima
Registrar / Director of Elections



Quilcia I. Moronta
Member

VACANT
Member

**CRANSTON BOARD OF CANVASSERS
869 PARK AVE
CRANSTON, RI 02910-2786**

March 15, 2025

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-5381 (Primary Election Calendar)

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 for **H-5381**, an act that would reform and make significant improvements to our election system by providing more time and better procedures for the review of candidate nomination papers, as well as moving the Statewide Primary Election earlier in September, beginning in 2026. This bill is supported by a unanimous vote of both the RI Town and City Clerks' Association and the RI Board of Elections, the Secretary of State, and the RI League of Cities and Towns.

H-5381 is long overdue. In 2009, Congress passed the MOVE Act, which requires states to send out mail ballots to overseas and military voters at least 45 days prior to the General Election. In response, nearly every state in the country moved their primary back – but Rhode Island has not yet done so. The state is now in perennial danger of failing to comply with this federal law, which would trigger a lawsuit from the Justice Department. As it stands, our September Statewide Primary is held so close to this deadline that there is insufficient time to conduct proper recounts and post-primary certification, such as risk-limiting audits. Furthermore, the important processes of designing, proofing, and printing ballots for the November election must be rushed and accelerated, which can substantially increase the propensity for errors that would compromise the election.

Another significant problem caused by Rhode Island's **latest-in-the-nation September Primary** is the turnaround of voting equipment. After the primary date, it takes weeks for voting machines, ballot boxes, and accessible ballot marking devices to be picked up at hundreds of polling locations by the BOE, inventoried, cleaned up, retested, reprogrammed, and re-certified – not to mention an even faster turnaround for early voting in mid-October. It then takes weeks more to deliver this equipment back out to over 400 polls for the General Election and early voting sites. It is imperative that this equipment is properly tested and certified, and that the process not be rushed.

However, because of early voting starting 20 days before the General Election, that equipment must be ready for delivery only days after the final ballot designs are certified, and the remaining equipment for Election Day must likewise begin delivery shortly thereafter. This causes state election administrators to scramble working with seasonal staff to get this equipment ready in time, with no margin for delay or error. While election officials have continued to do phenomenal work to make this process happen accurately and efficiently, at great personal stress working weekends and long hours, it is a system set up for error and that must be modified.

Local boards also have significant deadlines to meet in the days following the September primary, not the least of which is processing a backlog of thousands of frozen voter registrations from the 30-day period leading up to the primary. Long hours and work on weekends are often necessary just to catch up on this backlog, not to mention

the myriad other time-sensitive duties local boards must perform in September and early October, ranging from proofing ballots to generating referenda mailers and required election ads to recruiting and training poll workers. Having just an extra week to spread out these critical, complex tasks would make a significant difference.

In recent years I have been fortunate to meet local election officials around the country, and when I explain to them how late in the election calendar our major Statewide Primary is, their jaw drops – they cannot fathom how Rhode Island election officials manage to turn around our voting equipment, ballot proofing, and other critical operations so quickly, all without missing vital federal deadlines for our overseas and military voters. The fact Rhode Island state and local election officials pull off this miracle each cycle should not be used as a reason for continuing this clearly problematic practice; it's long past time for Rhode Island to no longer have the latest primary in the entire United States and give election officials adequate time to do our jobs well in preparation for the November General Election.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Nicholas J. Lima".

Nicholas J. Lima
Registrar / Director of Elections

Cc: Kirk McDonough, Chairperson, Cranston Board of Canvassers