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Written Testimony Against H. 5383

R. I. General Assembly House Committee on State Government & Elections

March 18, 2025

Good evening Chairman Evan Shanley and members of the House State Government and Elections Committee. My name is Colten and I am a second-year student at Brown University studying History and a member of the organization Brown Votes. I am here to testify **against House bill H 5383**, which changes the obligation of school districts regarding voter registration drives from "shall" to "may". I believe this legislation abdicates responsibility on the part of the school district and harms students in the process.

When school districts are not required to provide voter registration drives, they will stop holding voter registration drives. That's the only reason why this wording would be changed in the first place. To allow for "flexibility" which, in practice, means fewer students getting involved, engaged, and registered to vote. This is not to say voter registration drives will not continue in certain school districts, but they will align on the usual axes of privilege. This will be yet another way those students are left on the margins.

For the school districts who want an exemption, there will always be a reason that school districts "can't" provide a voter registration drive. Whether it's the timing, the money, or the logistics. If this is the case, where a school district is pulling shoelaces and they can't make ends meet, I think instead it should be the responsibility of this body to step in and provide assistance where needed. In our democracy, our priority should be an educated, informed citizenry, and whether this body decides that opportunity should be maintained or eroded speaks volumes about the future of our country.

As a student at Brown University and member of Brown Votes, I strongly believe bill H 5383 is a step in the wrong direction for this beautiful state. If students are allowed the opportunity to engage, they are more likely to engage for their entire life. Without the requirement to hold these voter registration drives many students might never see themselves as voters, activists, or even legislators. I hope that you consider voting down this piece of legislation to continue to benefit Rhode Islanders. Thank you very much for your time and consideration on this matter.