

Natalya Cabral  
Co-chair of Youth Engagement Committee at Brown Votes, Brown University  
Written Testimony Against H. 5383  
R.I. General Assembly House Committee on State Government & Elections

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for having me here today to testify on this important issue **against House Bill 5383**. My name is Natalya Cabral, and I am a Co-Chair of the Youth Engagement Committee at Brown Votes, the nonpartisan University-sponsored voting and democratic participation initiative of Brown University, where I am a second-year concentrating in Education and International & Public Affairs. The Youth Engagement Committee at Brown Votes focuses on increasing youth civic education and participation.

I come to you today in my position at Brown Votes, having been born and raised in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and attending Pawtucket Public Schools and now Brown University. Having been a student in Rhode Island's public schools, I know firsthand the importance of civic engagement at a young age. I would not be where I am today without it. That being said, I registered to vote at a young age, but I am a special case—I've understood the importance of democratic participation from a young age. As I now earn a degree at a 4-year university, I join the group of youth that is most likely to civically engage in our democracy, leaving two-year university students and graduates who decide not to pursue a higher education at the wayside<sup>1</sup>. Democratic participation should not be gatekept to the youth who are privileged enough to upwardly motivate through a higher education.

It is necessary for our schools to continue to be required to host voter registration drives. If not, we risk creating future generations that are not engaged in their community and democracy. With contemporary politics reaching an all-time high of polarization, it is the time to encourage all to head to the polls—not restrict voter access. Changing the phrasing of 17-9.1-4.1. from *shall* to *may* leaves hosting voter registration drives at high schools up to the local governments. This actively acknowledges that registration drives will not operate at current levels, decreasing the registered youth population in Rhode Island. For many teens without a solid support system at home, this may be the only chance for them to register or for them to realize they may want to.

Registering our youth gives them a chance to be engaged, educated, and the kind of citizens our country was made for—those who advocate for the future they want to see. Now is the time to stand up and protect our American democratic process— for our youth.

Thank you.  
Natalya Cabral

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<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3158614/#:~:text=Findings%20point%20to%20declines%20in,the%20government%20or%20elected%20officials>