



128 DORRANCE STREET, SUITE 400  
PROVIDENCE, RI 02903  
401.831.7171 (t)  
401.831.7175 (f)  
www.riaclu.org | info@riaclu.org

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 19-S 339, RELATING TO VOTER ID March 21, 2019

The ACLU strongly supports this legislation, which would repeal the Voter ID law that took effect in 2012. We believe that passage of that law was a step backward in the long and continuing struggle for voting equality.

Leaving aside the many policy arguments for repealing the voter ID law, it is important to note the practical argument as well: although no person in Rhode Island in recent memory has been criminally charged with voter impersonation fraud, the implementation of the voter ID law has clearly impacted the legitimate voting rights of some residents.

A number of voter ID proponents, in pushing for passage of voter ID, claimed that residents were sure to have one of the acceptable forms of required identification under the law. But the Secretary of State's office had to issue over 900 free voter identification cards in 2012. Further, this did not eliminate the problem of voters arriving at the polls without identification. In fact, for the 2012 election season, the Secretary of State's office reported that 190 voters requested provisional ballots solely because they lacked an acceptable form of voter identification.

In elections since the adoption of voter ID, the ACLU has had poll monitors routinely see people improperly denied the right to vote because of this law. Reports we have issued after the 2012 and 2016 Presidential elections provide strong anecdotal evidence of the problems caused by this law across the state. Across the state, ACLU poll monitors have witnessed the unlawful disenfranchisement of voters due to improper operation of this unnecessary law. To give just a few examples from those municipalities:

\* In Smithfield during the 2012 primary election, an ACLU poll monitor witnessed one voter turned away for lack of identification. Because she arrived shortly before the polls closed, she did not return with acceptable ID and thus never got to vote.

\* In Providence, a voter without ID was allowed to cast a provisional ballot, but was wrongly told he had to go to the Board of Canvassers the following day, with identification, in order to have his vote count.

\* In Warwick, a voter was turned away not because he did not have identification, but because he refused to present it. This voter was denied a provisional ballot, and wrongly told that such ballots were available only to those *unable* to present identification.