



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY ON 25-S 520, RELATING TO ELECTIONS – MAIL BALLOTS March 20, 2025

The ACLU of Rhode Island supports this legislation, which would increase access to automatic mail ballots by removing a requirement that voters reapply in every election in order to receive an automatic mail ballot. Mail ballots are important tools to allow voters to vote on their own schedule and not on a weekday competing with childcare, work, and transportation schedules.

Currently in Rhode Island, only a voter who is “indefinitely confined because of physical illness or infirmity or disabled for an indefinite period or who is a long-term resident in a nursing home” can request to automatically receive a mail ballot for every election. While this law made significant progress for voting access by ensuring more people could vote regardless of their ability to reach the polls, this bill expands that language so that any Rhode Island voter can request a mail ballot be sent to them. Eight other states already employ this system.¹

We believe that expanding access to automatic mail ballots is crucial for ensuring continued voting accessibility, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a significant increase in the use of mail ballots. As an example of this important change, in the 2020 presidential election, Rhode Islanders cast 170,095 mail ballots.² Four years prior, in the 2016 presidential election, only 40,945 mail ballots were cast.³ Even in the most recent presidential election in 2024, over 55,000 mail ballots were cast.⁴

This is a choice clearly favored by many Rhode Islanders, and we support legislation like this that accommodates that interest.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

¹ Arizona, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Virginia. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-3-states-with-permanent-absentee-voting-lists>

² <https://elections.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur756/files/2022-02/statewidesummary2020gen.pdf>

³ https://elections.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur756/files/publications/Election_Publications/Countbooks/2016-Count-Book.pdf

⁴ <https://elections.ri.gov/sites/g/files/xkgbur756/files/2024-12/Gen24SummaryReport.pdf>