



## H6003 Representative Katherine Kazarian S516 Senator Dawn Euer

This bill increases access to early and mail voting, while securing, modernizing, and streamlining the mail and early voting process.

### MAJOR PROVISIONS:

#### No-excuse mail voting

Currently Rhode Island voters must provide an excuse, including the fact that they may not want to vote at their polling place on Election Day, to request a mail ballot. Under this bill, any voter may vote by mail without the need for an excuse or special circumstances.

#### Permanent absentee list

Voters can opt-in to automatically receive a mail ballot in future elections without needing to submit a new request each time. This saves the state money on paper ballot-request forms and ensures eligible voters who wish to vote by mail have a secure and common-sense means of doing so.

#### Rigorous voter registration list maintenance

The bill bolsters Rhode Island's existing voter registration list maintenance process to ensure that records are up-to-date. It requires the Secretary of State to cross check the voter file at least four times per year, and implements a new process to automatically update records when a voter's address changes.

#### Online mail ballot request

Registered voters will be able to request a mail ballot using an online form, saving election administrators time and money. This also reduces the risk that a request form will be lost or damaged, or that manual data-entry will result in clerical error.

#### Enhanced signature verification

The signature verification process will involve an initial review of each signature by an election official or signature verification device, subject to additional review by a bipartisan team of election officials if a potential mismatch is flagged. Voters will have the opportunity to correct any deficiencies up until the seventh day after the election. The Board of Elections will be required to audit the signature verification device, should they use one.

#### Early voting

This bill creates a permanent in-person early voting period beginning 20 days before election day and continuing until the day before the election. This includes the weekend before the election, for voters who may not be able to cast their ballot during regular business hours.

#### Ballot drop boxes

Voters can return mail ballots to secure drop boxes which are monitored regularly by election officials. The bill sets standards for the number and placement of drop boxes in each community, with more drop boxes in larger communities.

#### No witness requirement

Rhode Island is one of the handful of states to require that mail ballots be signed by two witnesses or a notary public. This requirement was waived, without problems, in four elections in 2020 and 2021. Under this proposal mail ballots will no longer need to be witnessed or notarized. Voters' identities are confirmed by their signature.

#### New primary date

Rhode Island's Primary Election is among the latest in the country. The bill moves the date of the primary election to the third Tuesday after the first Monday in August. That provides more time to get ballots to military and overseas voters, and more time for election administrators to conduct rigorous audits of the election results.

