

H O U S I N G



N E T W O R K

February 15, 2022

Senator Cynthia A. Coyne
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Testimony Supporting: S2216

To Chair Coyne and the Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Housing Network of Rhode Island, our member agencies and the low-income Rhode Islanders we seek to serve, I write in strong support for S2216 (the Same-Day Voter Registration Resolution) which will put a question on the ballot asking Rhode Island voters to amend the state constitution, enabling the General Assembly to change the voter registration deadline up to the day of an election.

The Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) is the membership association for 17 nonprofit community development organizations. Our members operate and maintain safe, decent, and affordable homes for over 15,000 low- and moderate-income renters across Rhode Island.

Housing is undeniably interconnected to voter access and engagement. A stable home and a permanent address allows a resident in being able to register to vote without facing additional barriers as they try to navigate an already complicated system, provides them with more transparent information with regard to their assigned polling places and helps households feel more supported in feeling empowered and encouraged to vote by strong community ties. Housing insecurity causes many Rhode Islanders to have to bounce from one home to the next, and with each move, their voter information becomes outdated. With the rise in housing instability in Rhode Island, many voters face being turned away from the polls due to the likelihood of them not having the ability to re-register under their correct address as they prioritize managing their immediate needs such as shelter and financial support.

A recent study done at Princeton University found a correlation between eviction rates and voter turnout for the 2016 elections. A 1% increase in the residential eviction rate was associated with a 0.39% decline in the voter turnout rate in neighborhoods with historically high eviction rates. Neighborhoods with the lowest eviction rates showed that a 1% increase in the eviction rate correlated with a **5.54%** decline in voter turnout. In six states, election results were decided by less than **two** percentage points. (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2022).

In the wake of a pandemic and a surge in rental costs, many Rhode Island families are experiencing housing insecurity - meaning many of our low-income neighborhoods are likely experiencing a form voter suppression. The immediate and significant consequences of evictions such as experiencing homelessness, finding emergency shelter, transitioning from one housing unit to another, and the loss of supportive networks has a strong influence on whether or not people vote.

When you are struggling to survive day to day, making sure you are registered to vote in the correct place is often not top of mind for people. In order to improve voting access for Rhode Islanders experiencing housing insecurity, your support for same-day registration is critical. If a voter moves after the 30-day period in which they are currently required to register, they may not be able to exercise their right as a voter. Same-day registration will remove barriers to the ballot box, particularly for Rhode Islanders experiencing housing insecurity. An absence of same-day registration strengthens evictions' already damaging effects and suppresses the voices of citizens experiencing housing instability.

In conclusion, I ask that you support S2216, and give Rhode Island voters the opportunity to authorize this timely constitutional amendment. Rhode Islanders are undeniably facing a housing crisis, but they do not have to experience barriers to voting as well.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melina Lodge".

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