



January 13, 2026

VIA EMAIL

RI Board of Elections
2000 Plainfield Pike
Cranston, RI 02921

Dear Members of the RI Board of Elections:

On behalf of Common Cause Rhode Island and the ACLU of Rhode Island, we are writing in response to the Board's consideration today of legislation that seeks to prohibit so-called ballot harvesting. We urge the Board's opposition to this proposal for reasons both substantive and practical.

We believe that there is nothing inherently wrong with allowing third parties to collect completed mail ballots from voters and deliver them to election officials. In many cases it serves a salutary purpose, especially for certain populations of voters who may need assistance with their ballot, including the elderly, those with disabilities, and individuals for whom English is not their first language. The significant limits imposed by this proposal could seriously hamper the exercise of the franchise for members of those groups.

The bill appears to create exceptions to a complete ban, but they are ambiguous and confusing, which is particularly problematic when criminal penalties are attached to the conduct. For example, voters appear to be allowed to have third parties return their ballot if they are "designated" or "deemed authorized" to do so. But this language suggests an element of formality to the process that is not explained in the bill. Similarly, while "designated" persons are allowed to return up to ten ballots, they appear to be completely barred from "possessing" the ballots in the first place. Finally, the bill does not make clear the methods by which the state will determine that a third party has returned more than ten ballots without "authorization."

It is important to emphasize that state law already contains serious felony penalties for any person who "deceives, coerces, or interferes with" a voter casting a ballot, or who even attempts to do so. R.I.G.L. §17-20-30. The incident that appears to be driving the introduction of this proposal also clearly involves conduct that is already criminally punishable.

Because this bill is unnecessary and may create barriers for the return of legitimate ballots by some voters, we request that the Board turn down this proposal, as we believe it has done in the past.

Sincerely,

John Marion
Executive Director
Common Cause Rhode Island

Steven Brown
Executive Director
ACLU of Rhode Island

cc: Miguel Nuñez
Ray Marcaccio