

# Safe and Healthy Voting in 2020 Act



## Why do we need this bill?

The global COVID-19 pandemic has upended life in the Ocean State, but we cannot let it stop our democracy. We need to make changes to Rhode Island elections NOW so we can be ready for the record turnout we expect this fall. The best way we can prepare is to give voters a choice of how they vote – by mail, via early in-person voting or on election day. By providing these choices, and making each of them safe, we can protect both the right to vote and preserve public health.

## What does this bill do?

The Safe and Healthy Voting in 2020 Act makes several temporary changes to Rhode Island election laws to give voters more choices and give election administrators the flexibility to run an election during this extraordinary time. The proposed changes include, but are not limited to, the following:



Requires the Secretary of State to send a mail ballot application to every registered voter in Rhode Island.



Waives the requirement that a voter casting a mail ballot obtain the signature of two witnesses or one notary public, to reduce human interaction. Allows for the electronic matching of the voter's signature to verify identity.



Requires drop boxes be placed in all Rhode Island communities where voters can safely and securely deposit their mail ballots, to ensure they arrive before election day.



Provides 20 days of early voting (including the weekend before the election) for voters who want to vote in-person, but not on election day. Requires that the early voting process allow a voter to cast a regular ballot.



Requires safety protocols for polling places for voters who want to, or have to, cast a ballot on election day.

Rhode Island's presidential preference primary taught us several valuable lessons, which we've applied in this legislation:

- Voters like voting by mail. In 2016, fewer than 5% of ballots were cast by mail, and in 2020 more than 80% of voters used a mail ballot.
- Voters like to drop those mail ballots in drop boxes. More than 5,000 of the state's 100,000 mail ballots were put in drop boxes around the state.
- Some voters sent their mail ballots in at the last minute. We need to allow ballots that are mailed by election day to be counted.
- Voters need their ballots sooner, and election administrators need more time to process mail ballot applications. Voters should only need to apply once to receive ballots for both the September primary and November general election.

## What can you do?

We don't have much time to make these changes so they can take effect for the fall elections. Call and write your state representative and senator today! Go to [rilegislature.gov](http://rilegislature.gov) to find their contact information. Ask them to support the Safe and Healthy Voting in 2020 Act.