



**Testimony in Support of S-2007 and S-2216
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
February 15, 2022**

The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports passage of S-2216, The “Let RI Vote Act” sponsored by Senator Euer and S-2216, Senator DiMario’s ‘Same-Day Registration’ resolution. Both of these proposals will improve Rhode Islanders’ access to voting. As an organization committed to economic and racial equity in our state and country, we know how fundamental the right to vote is to our democracy and to achieving those goals.

The pandemic has taught us many things, among which is that we can expand access to voting without impairing the integrity of the process. S-2216 makes permanent a number of those lessons. Importantly, the bill makes it easier to vote by mail by allowing no-excuse mail ballots, online application for mail ballots, removing the witness/notary requirement and requiring ballot drop boxes in each community. The bill also promotes access to voting for people who are blind and for residents whose native language is not English, important civil rights protections. The bill protects the integrity of the voting process, as well as the rights of voters by requiring the Secretary of State to update the voter file at least four times per year.

We also support changing the voter registration deadline to allow Rhode Islanders to vote up to and on Election Day for all candidates, and not only president and vice president. The governor and general assembly members can have as much impact on the lives of Rhode Islanders as the top federal leaders. It thus makes sense to expand same-day registration and voting for all elected officials. This would bring our state in line with 22 others, including 4 New England states. Including a question on the ballot to amend the state constitution to expand same day registration/voting gives Rhode Islanders the opportunity to weigh in on this issue.

This is a critical year to take action to expand voting rights. Tragically, many states are enacting laws to curtail the right to vote and federal action is slow in coming. Rhode Island can be a leader during this historic moment by enacting S-2007 and S-2216 and standing up to protect and expand the right to vote. “The right to vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool or instrument in a democratic society.” John Lewis.