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S 2112: A Full Vote for First Time Voters

When young people vote, democracy wins. By ensuring that first time voters can vote in primary elections, we encourage greater general election participation, and jump-start the process of civic engagement. In S 2112, we have an opportunity to clarify a grey area in the law, energize young voters and protect voting rights.

- Young people vote! Rhode Island presidential primary saw a boom in overall turnout, but particularly among young people. **18-30 year olds increased their share of the Rhode Island electorate** from 8% in 2004 to 13% this year, according to CNN's exit poll.
- Voting is a habit: if you voted in the last election, you are more likely to vote in the next one. In a 2003 study, researchers showed that participation in the previous election increased the probability of voting in the next one by up to 47%, as much as can other well-known factors like education and income, and parental voting behavior. **Encouraging early participation keeps our democracy vital in the long term.**
- Allowing 17 year olds who will be 18 by the general election to vote in primary elections is a matter of basic fairness and good elections practices. Everyone who is eligible to vote in a general election should be able to vote in the primary. In Rhode Island, we allow anyone who will be 18 by the general election to register to vote – **the registration system would not have to be modified at all.**
- Right now, 19 states or state parties explicitly allow anyone who is registered and eligible to vote in the general election to vote in the preceding primary. **States which ensure the voting rights of young people in this manner include Iowa, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nevada Maine Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon Kentucky, Indiana and Virginia,** to name a few.
- In addition to FairVote, this reform has the support of Common Cause RI, Young Voices, Ocean State Action, UFCW Local 328 and others. **It is also supported by the Secretary of State.**