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## Law School News: Two RWU Law Lawmakers Fight to 'Let R.I. Vote' 03-24-2022

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March 24, 2022

# *Law School News*

## Two RWU Law Lawmakers Fight to 'Let R.I. Vote'

State Senator Dawn Euer L'10 and 1L House Majority Whip Katherine Kazarian are leading the charge for the Let RI Vote Act, which would make permanent the changes Rhode Island put in place during the pandemic.

March 24, 2022

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Let RI Vote Act co-sponsors: Senator Dawn Euer L'10 (D-RI District 13), left, and R.I. House Majority Whip Katherine Kazarian, a current RWU Law 1L.

While Congress struggles to pass federal voter rights legislation, a pair of RWU Law-affiliated lawmakers – Senator Dawn Euer L'10 (D-RI District 13, Newport), and current 1L, House Majority Whip Katherine Kazarian (D-RI District 63) – are focusing on the Ocean State as lead

co-sponsors of the Let RI Vote Act, which aims to make permanent the changes Rhode Island put in place during the pandemic to make voting safer and easier.

“In the 2020 election cycle, we saw how the changes that we made for the pandemic really helped people get out to vote,” Kazarian said. “The Board of Elections liked them, our constituents liked them – we had a record number of people vote in the 2020 election. And so many people told me that they loved the new processes. It made it easier for them to plan to vote, rather than just hoping that their schedules worked out on Election Day.”

Kazarian added that the bill would also help avoid voter confusion. “People voted in a certain way in 2020,” she said. “I would hate to have people go to vote in 2022 and have all the rules changed on them. We want to be consistent. Because at the end of the day, it’s all about getting people engaged, getting them registered and getting them to participate in democracy.”

The Let RI Vote Act would, among other things, expand the right to vote early, either in-person or by mail; allow voters to apply for a mail-in ballot online; require every community to have at least one ballot drop box; and set up a multilingual hotline to inform voters about the process. It would also eliminate the requirement that voters secure the signatures of two witnesses or a notary public to use a mail ballot. Instead voter identity would be confirmed by a signature verification process.

Such rules, Euer pointed out, have made Rhode Island an outlier.

“We’re the only state, besides Alabama I think, that has that requirement,” she said. “I don’t know the history of how [such rules] came to exist in Rhode Island, but they’ve ended up just being ‘security theater’ and a barrier for folks. It’s critically important for any state government to modernize and update its processes to reflect changing times.”

Kazarian agreed. “In some ways Rhode Island is in the minority” regarding voting rules,” she said. “Passing Let Rhode Island Vote would align it more with the majority.”

Currently in committee, the bill has a good chance of passing in time for the Fall 2020 elections, according to both lawmakers.

“Katie and I have spent a lot of time having conversations and trying to get everybody on the same page. I’m feeling very positive about it,” Euer said. “I’ve worked on these issues for a long time and it was actually an area of my practice. Prior to being elected, I represented clients before the Board of Elections and litigated election matters in Superior Courts. From my perspective, anything we can do to improve access for folks is really something we should be doing.”

Kazarian is also cautiously optimistic.

“I don’t think it’s ever easy to pass legislation, no matter what you’re trying to do,” she said. “This is a very nuanced, complicated topic, and we’re trying to make sure that everybody’s questions and concerns are answered. By the time we are able to get this bill to the floor,

members of the General Assembly will hopefully feel good about what they're voting on and know how it will help their constituents. There's always a lot of work to do, but I will say I could have no greater partner than Senator Dawn Euer."