

March 24, 2022

Testimony in Support of H 7472—An Act Relating to Elections—Primary Elections—General Assembly Offices—Ranked Choice Voting

Common Cause Rhode Island supports ranked choice voting (RCV). In an RCV election, voters rank candidates from their most favorite to least favorite. When ranked choice ballots are tabulated, if a candidate receives a majority of votes, they win the contest. If no candidate receives a majority of voters, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated. If a voter's first-choice candidate is eliminated, their vote is counted for their next choice. The process repeats until a candidate receives a majority of votes.

Our current election system forces voters to make a strategic choice about which candidate they believe is most electable. It limits choices for voters by pressuring candidates to drop out for fear of being a spoiler. It results in candidates often winning primaries with a plurality of votes. It allows candidates to ignore communities as they seek to win that plurality.

Ranked choice voting incentivizes candidates to seek a broader base of support because they will need to be ranked by more voters in order to win. It will diversify the choices for voters by reducing the pressure on candidates to drop out at the risk of being a spoiler. It reduces the incentive for negative campaigning as candidates seek to be ranked by the maximum number of voters.

A growing number of jurisdictions are using ranked choice voting, including the states of Maine and Alaska (starting in 2022) as well as New York City. Five states used RCV for Democratic presidential primaries in 2020.

Common Cause New York did extensive polling of voters during the inaugural use of ranked choice voting in New York City elections. That research showed an overwhelming number of voters embraced ranked choice voting, with 85% ranking at least two candidates in the mayoral election. Voters found ranked choice voting to be easy to use, with 94% of voters surveyed reporting that their ballot was simple to complete.