

Testimony of Common Cause Rhode Island in Support of H 7540--An Act Relating to Elections--Primaries for Election of Delegates to National Conventions and for Presidential Preference

Position: Support

Common Cause Rhode Island supports H 7540 which would require the use of ranked choice voting for the Presidential Preference Primary (PPP) in Rhode Island.

We believe the PPP is the right election for Rhode Island to adopt the use of ranked choice voting. By the time the presidential nominating contests reach Rhode Island, there are often more than two candidates. Ranked choice voting provides an opportunity for voters to more fully express their preferences by rank ordering multiple candidates, and that's literally the name of the primary election.

The presidential election draws significant media coverage and voters are likely to be quite familiar with multiple candidates; not just their top choice. That makes it easier for them to rank those candidates in the order of their preference.

While there are often more than two candidates in the PPP, the need to certify candidates and print and send military and overseas ballots means that by the time Rhode Islanders vote several of the candidates have removed themselves from the contest, but their names remain on the ballot, as we will see on April 2nd. Ranked choice voting provides an elegant solution for this problem because the voter who chooses a candidate that has withdrawn has their next preference applied during the tabulation.

In 2020 Rhode Island became the second state to conduct a risk-limiting audit (RLA) on a presidential primary. Jurisdictions have begun piloting RLAs for RCV elections. Additionally, we know that Rhode Island's tabulators are capable of accommodating ranked choice voting, as we've seen in Maine where many jurisdictions use the same company.

Ranked choice voting is expanding across the country, with two states currently using it for some statewide and federal elections. Numerous municipalities have used it for many years. In 2024 at least five states will use ranked choice voting for some of their presidential primaries. Common Cause Rhode Island believes that in 2028 Rhode Island should be one of those states.