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Testimony on behalf of: House Bill No. 7788: AN ACT RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- PRIMARIES FOR ELECTION OF DELEGATES TO NATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND FOR PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE (Establishes the Ranked Choice Voting for Rhode Island Presidential Primaries and provides for new sections on ranked choice voting tabulation and results reporting.)

Why I support this bill:

To whom it may concern,

There are a myriad of benefits to the implementation of Ranked Choice Voting, but I am writing about a very important aspect of RCV that is extremely important for democracy, and that is its ability to help decrease polarization and its ability to make campaigns more positive.

Today's political system is widely viewed as dysfunctional, with the two opposite poles of the political spectrum remaining entrenched against each other, constantly opposing each other openly and with disdain to appease their base, while achieving very little actual progress on important legislation. This atmosphere also applies itself to campaigning, where voters are barraged with negative ads and rhetoric targeting the opposite side, which either helps fuel the fire of partisan hatred in the electorate, and causes a chunk of the electorate to sit out due to frustration. At one point, the American political system fostered compromise and sensible partisanship, with both parties acting as an umbrella for a large and diverse groups of constituents, and there were many politicians considered in 'the middle of the road'. Due to well-meaning reforms, and changes in the electorate and technology over the past few decades, however, the once functional system has become a cultivator of hyper partisanship and dysfunction, and the political center has practically shriveled up, as stated in Julian E. Zelizer's book 'In Defense of Partisanship'. The disappearance of the center is especially devastating, since a political center is needed to actually transmit ideas across the political spectrum and to put them into action. It also allowed for an entire electorate to shift politically. But without one, both sides throw ideas at each other without either being moved, which benefits no-one. hyperpolarization has also made each side see each other as the enemy, making people do anything to stop the someone they are opposed to. This, along with growing disgust with and distrust in the system, has brought our democracy to breaking point.

Though there is no one solution to fix this, and we need a multifaceted approach, RCV is one of these tools. Research done by FairVote on elections in Alaska and Cambridge MA have proven that RCV has both reduced legislative polarization and elected candidates that are more likely to vote across party lines, since politicians are no longer just accountable to their base, but have to appeal to a broad section of the electorate due to the winner of an RCV election having to win a majority of voters, and it encouraging higher turnout, also shown by FairVote. On top of this, FairVote has also done research showing that campaigns done in districts where RCV is used has increased the use of positive campaigning and has even increased positive media coverage, which is a desperately needed benefit. This is a product of candidates in RCV elections having to win over voters second

and third choices, as well as also allowing for candidates to team up with each other in an election cycle.

At our nations 250th anniversary, let us not let democracy collapse in the birthplace of modern democracy, and where it is such an aspect of, it is inconceivable without. Right here in Rhode Island, we have a chance to save it with the bills H7788 and H7981, which will help implement RCV in the 2028 presidential primaries and allow localities to use RCV for local elections respectively, which are great ways for voters to experiment with its use. I hope the committee will take into account these bills and advance them to the general assembly for a floor vote.

Sincerely,

Dante Diwan.