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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:

In Support of H7788 and S2590 – Ranked Choice Voting for RI Presidential Primaries Jeffrey Smith–North Kingstown

My name is Jeffrey Smith, and I live in North Kingstown. Over the past 18 months, through my work with Ocean State Ranked Choice Voting, I've had hundreds of conversations with Rhode Islanders at farmers markets, festivals, and community events. These conversations have shaped my understanding of how people feel about our elections. What stands out most is how many voters feel frustrated, boxed in, or unheard by the current system. And when they learn how Ranked Choice Voting works, the most common response is: "That's so much better—why don't we already do this?"

That personal experience is backed up by data. Research from jurisdictions that use RCV shows several consistent trends:

- Voter satisfaction increases. In a 2021 study of RCV cities, more than 70% of voters reported that RCV was easy to use and gave them more meaningful choices.
- Majority support improves. In traditional plurality elections, winners can—and often do—prevail with less than 50% of the vote. RCV ensures the winner has broad support, which strengthens legitimacy.
- Negative campaigning decreases. Analyses of RCV elections in places like San Francisco and Minneapolis found that voters reported less negativity and more civility, because candidates must appeal beyond their base to earn second and third choice support.
- Representation expands. Cambridge, MA, which has used a ranked system for decades, consistently elects more diverse councils than comparable cities. Minneapolis saw similar gains after adopting RCV.
- Voter engagement rises. Turnout in RCV municipal elections has often increased, particularly among younger voters and communities that historically participate at lower rates.

These findings align with what I've heard from Rhode Islanders: people want more voice, more choice, and a system that encourages candidates to build broader coalitions.

I also want to speak to why this matters right now. Rhode Island is not immune to the polarization affecting the rest of the country. Many voters tell me they feel forced to choose "the least bad option" or vote strategically rather than honestly. Others feel discouraged when crowded primaries

produce winners who don't reflect a true majority. These frustrations erode trust in our democratic institutions.

Ranked Choice Voting is not a cure all, but it is a practical, evidence based improvement. It gives voters the freedom to express their full preferences. It encourages candidates to reach beyond their core supporters. And it produces outcomes that better reflect the will of the majority.

The 2028 presidential primary gives Rhode Island a responsible, well timed opportunity to implement RCV. We have years to prepare, educate voters, and evaluate the results. This is a chance to modernize our elections in a thoughtful, measured way.

For these reasons—grounded in both personal experience and data—I respectfully urge you to support H7788 and S2590. These bills would bring Ranked Choice Voting to Rhode Island's presidential primaries and give voters a stronger, more representative voice in choosing our leaders.

Thank you for your time and consideration.