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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:

Madam/Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bills 7788 and 7981 addressing the issue of ranked choice voting. My name is Steven Colucci, and I am a resident of North Kingstown. While you are perhaps familiar with the idea of ranked choice voting I am enthusiastic about it for several reasons. Primary among them is the issue of candidates winning an election with less than a majority of the votes cast, meaning that more people who voted may not necessarily support the winning candidate. That candidate may have little motivation to consider the voting public at large as opposed to those who voted for him or her. Essentially, it promotes reaching out to a broader sample of voters and reduces negative campaigning. Research has shown that primary candidates with majority support tend to do better in general elections which has bipartisan appeal.

Ranked choice voting also allows for greater engagement in the election process. Ranked choice voting is described as minimizing wasted votes. I think of it as maximizing the voice of the voter. In an election with more than two candidates if a voter's first choice loses the voter is likely to just bow out. However, if their vote goes to another candidate they still have a stake in the process. Coalitions are more likely to develop with stronger candidates having a broader consensus.

We have already had several statewide elections with the plurality voting method resulting in a winner with less than 50% of the ballots. As recently as March 17th both Illinois Senate Primary winners garnered less than 41% of the vote. Plurality voting often leads to a runoff, an expensive and time consuming effort that often results in lower turnout and therefore less engagement. Fairvote.org reported a median decline of 63% in voter turnout for the 2024 federal primary runoffs. This is not what we want when we think about increasing citizen participation.

I urge the members of the committee and the House at-large to vote in favor of these important bills that will make votes meaningful and counted!

Steven Colucci, PhD

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