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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:

My name is Theodore R. Herman, I live in Providence, Rhode Island. We've got a great opportunity to implement Ranked Choice Voting in Rhode Island in time for upcoming Presidential primaries and future local elections, and I am urging you to support and pass House Bills 7788 and 7981.

Here's why this is so important and why we should be passing these bills.

Ranked choice voting is a straightforward and bipartisan procedural reform grounded in some of the most fundamental of democratic principles: majority rule, the freedom to vote one's conscience, and the equal treatment of all votes. It ensures that election outcomes more accurately reflect the will of the people while giving every voter a stronger, more meaningful voice.

First, ranked choice voting upholds majority rule. In our current plurality elections, candidates can win an election with far less than 50% of the vote when the ballot features three or more candidates. Ranked choice voting corrects this by building into the ballot a runoff model using voters' ranked preferences, ensuring that the eventual winner earns majority support. This produces outcomes that better reflect the collective will of the electorate and strengthens voter confidence and satisfaction with the results.

Here's a local example. State Sen. Sam Zurier won the election in the primary race of his first campaign for the Senate with 31% of the vote. On that day most voters might have preferred another winner, but our plurality system likely prevented the true will of the voters from being expressed in the results. We'll never know, but I maintain that not knowing this can lead to voter frustration, reduced confidence in our democracy, and lower voter turnout in future elections. Sen. Zurier appreciates this, which has led him to be an avid supporter of ranked choice reform.

Second, ranked choice voting allows voters to choose their true first-choice candidate without fear of "throwing away" their vote. In plurality systems, voters often feel compelled to abandon their preferred candidate in favor of one they perceive as more viable. Ranked choice voting removes this pressure and enables voters to freely vote their conscience. If a voter's top choice cannot win, their vote is transferred to their next preference, meaning their ballot continues to count. This encourages voter turnout and trust in our democracy.

Third, ranked choice voting fully respects the principle of "one person, one vote." Every voter casts a single ballot, and each ballot is counted equally in every round. No voter has more influence than another; the system simply allows each person to express a fuller set of preferences on that one

ballot. The counting process does not give anyone extra votes—it just ensures that each vote is used as effectively as possible to identify a majority-supported winner.

Finally, evidence shows that voters understand and support ranked choice voting. In New York City, for example, 96% of voters reported their ballot was understandable and simple to complete. Surveys across multiple jurisdictions consistently find that large majorities of voters say ranked choice voting is easy to use.

In sum, ranked choice voting is a bipartisan reform that strengthens majority rule, empowers voters, preserves electoral equality, and is both accessible and popular in practice.

We've got a great opportunity to implement ranked choice voting in Rhode Island in time for upcoming Presidential primaries and future local elections, now is the time to pass House Bills 7788 and 7981.

Sincerely,

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