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Testimony in OPPOSITION to H-7380: Prohibits the use of ranked choice voting in all local, state and federal public office elections.

Why I OPPOSE this bill:

My name is Melody Chan. I have lived in Providence since 2020, and I am a mathematician, employed at Brown University. I am respectfully writing to oppose House Bill 7380, since I support ranked choice voting, whereas this bill, the first of its kind introduced in Rhode Island, seeks to preemptively ban it.

What is ranked choice voting, anyways? It's actually pretty simple way for voters to express their full range of preferences. The strong majority of voters participating in ranked-choice elections have agreed that it is simple, and at rates that are consistent across party and demographic lines.

Imagine an election with three candidates, with the option for a run-off if no candidate wins a majority of the vote. If one candidate receives a majority of the votes, then great! They win. Otherwise, the third place candidate is eliminated, and a run-off election takes place between the top two. What happens in the run-off election? Well, the voters who already voted for the top two candidates are still happy with their choice and will probably stick with their candidate. But a voter who voted for the third-place candidate now has the opportunity to vote instead for one of the two remaining ones, should they so choose.

That's pretty much what Ranked Choice Voting is—in other words, that's exactly the effect that it has. Of course, with Ranked Choice, you don't actually organize a run-off election. Instead, voters are asked in one go to rank their preferred candidates, just in case. That way, if no candidate receives an outright majority, the candidate with the least votes can be eliminated and a run-off election can take place by using the records of voter preferences already in hand, for the voters who supported that candidate. Ranked Choice is a time-compressed way to effectuate run-off elections, without massive costs to voters and to the state of polling people again and again. In particular, ranked choice voting sticks to the "one person, one vote" principle exactly as much as holding one election, followed by another run-off election, adheres to "one person, one vote."

Just today, I was able to explain ranked choice voting, in a pretty idle conversation, to a bunch of parents hanging out at the playground together watching our kids after school. Honestly, no one was confused. People were just like "Yeah, sure. Makes sense." I explained the concept to my child who is in elementary school and she got it too. I really think it's pretty intuitive to rank things. We rank things all the time. My kid and her friends can all rank-order their Halloween candy exactly, down to the last Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. As adults, we all know how to order something in a restaurant, and change our order if we have to: "I'll have the clam chowder, but if you're out of that, I'll have the tomato soup." If you can say that, you can do ranked choice voting.