



**Testimony in Support of HB 8334 – Rhode Island Voting Rights Act
House Committee on State Government and Elections**

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**Hector Perez-Aponte, Racial Justice Policy Analyst, the Economic Progress
Institute**

The Economic Progress Institute supports Representative Kazarian’s HB 8334, which would create the Rhode Island Voting Rights Act to establish procedures to prevent discrimination in the voting process.

Rhode Islanders deserve to exercise their constitutionally protected right to vote without unnecessary hindrances or obstacles. However, the weakening of the federal Voting Rights Act (via Supreme Court decisions) has significantly reduced key protections that once prevented discriminatory voting practices, particularly in states with histories of voter suppression. By limiting federal oversight—such as preclearance requirements—U.S. Supreme Court rulings have made it easier for restrictive voting laws to be enacted without prior review, raising concerns about unequal access to the ballot. Accordingly, state action has become increasingly important to safeguard voting rights, ensure fair access, prevent discrimination, and maintain public confidence in democratic participation.

We also encourage **strengthening the bill through targeted amendments to expand protections for language access and translation services**, ensuring that voters with limited English proficiency can participate fully in the democratic process. Additionally, the bill should include **stronger safeguards for voters whose names may have changed**—such as due to marriage, divorce, or gender transition—to prevent unnecessary barriers or challenges to their eligibility at the polls.

HB 8334 would protect Rhode Islanders’ constitutional right to vote. In too many jurisdictions across the country, elected officials have tried to restrict voting and select their own voters. If elected officials truly seek to represent Rhode Islanders, they should ensure elections are fair—and they should aspire to be elected by as many voters as possible. We urge passage.

Dear Chairman Shanley, First Vice Chair Messier, Second Vice Chair Corvese, and Honorable Members of the State Government & Elections Committee,

Ocean State Ranked Choice Voting strongly opposes House Bill 7380, which would ban ranked choice voting (RCV) in Rhode Island. Below, we present rebuttals to several deceptive arguments frequently raised against RCV.

1. RCV opponents argue that we should ban ranked choice voting because it is banned in 19 states.

This is misleading. Four of the 19 states that have passed RCV “bans” (Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi) *actually actively use ranked choice voting for military and overseas voters (often called “UOCAVA voters” because they are subject to the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act)*. In fact, they actually use RCV for UOCAVA voters, since they do not have time to mail them second ballots for runoff elections. Those voters are asked to fill out a ranked choice ballot, and in the event of a runoff, their vote counts for whichever candidate they ranked higher. Of the other 15 states where RCV is banned, *11 have never used ranked choice voting*. The bans in those states were passed preemptively and without evidence. The remaining states include three where RCV was used on a limited basis in local elections prior to 1960 (Florida, Indiana and Ohio) and one in which its only use was in a party-run – *not* state-run – primary in 2020 (Kansas).

States that are banning RCV are not responding to evidence of its use in practice. They are proactively signaling their opposition to an electoral system that has demonstrated a capacity to increase voter turnout, strengthen representation for marginalized communities, and make campaigns more issue-focused and less driven by personal attacks.

2. In his written testimony, the Project Manager of the “Stop Ranked-Choice Voting Coalition” contends that “none of the supposed benefits [of RCV], like more civil politics or increased voter participation, have materialized.”

This is false. In 2022, Republican voters in Virginia’s 10th Congressional District used RCV to select their nominee, while their counterparts in the 7th District used the traditional pick-one system. 84% of voters in the ranked choice primary

reported that the candidates ran a positive campaign, compared to just 59% in the traditional primary. Only 4% of moderate voters in the ranked choice primary described the campaign as negative, compared to 17% in the traditional primary. Similarly, in Santa Fe, 67% of voters described the city's first RCV mayoral campaign as more positive than the previous race, while just 3% said the tone was more negative. Academic analyses from linguists at the Universities of Iowa and North Carolina corroborate these polling data.

On the question of turnout, a 2024 study by researchers at the Universities of California and Iowa found that voters are 17% more likely to turn out for municipal RCV elections than for pick-one races. A 2025 report shows that voter turnout increases for people of *all races and ethnicities* under RCV, and a 2020 study found that increases were especially high in low-income precincts. Additionally, cities such as New York, San Francisco, and St. Paul have seen the highest mayoral election turnout in decades after adopting ranked choice voting.

3. It is often claimed that RCV is “confusing for voters” and “unpopular.”

This is false. In New York City, 96% of voters in 2025 (and 95% of voters in 2021) found their ranked choice ballots easy to complete, and over three-quarters polled expressed support for keeping or expanding the system. Similarly, overwhelming supermajorities of voters in jurisdictions from Charlottesville, Virginia, to Eastpointe, Michigan, have described the system as simple and straightforward. And it's not a partisan issue – 56% of Virginia Republicans who experimented with RCV in 2022 stated that they preferred it to the traditional system.

4. Opponents of ranked choice voting claim that RCV “causes delays in the tabulation of results.” Typically, they point to Alaska as evidence of this.

This is false. The delays in Alaska results reporting are actually due to the fact that state law requires mail ballots received up to 15 days after the general election to be counted. Of course, the votes cannot be counted until all the ballots are received. The actual process of RCV tabulation just requires administrators to push a button and wait several seconds for the results to be calculated.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The Ocean State Ranked Choice Voting Board