
Oppose S 2951

From Sara V <saravieira803@hotmail.com>

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To Senate Judiciary Committee <SenateJudiciary@rilegislature.onmicrosoft.com>

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Sara Vieira and I am from Coventry.

I strongly oppose **Senate Bill 2951**, which would pave the way for ranked choice voting in Rhode Island municipalities through local charter amendments. While framed as giving communities “more choice,” this legislation risks introducing unnecessary complexity, higher costs, voter confusion, and reduced trust in local elections across the state.

Ranked choice voting replaces the simple “vote for one” system with mandatory ranking of candidates. Research and real-world experience show it creates more problems than it solves, especially at the local level where races are often lower-profile and voter engagement varies.

Key Reasons for Opposition:

1. Voter Confusion and Higher Error Rates

RCV requires voters to rank multiple candidates, increasing cognitive burden. Studies of cast vote records show error rates (overvotes, improper rankings, undervotes) are roughly **10 times higher** in RCV contests than in traditional races on the same ballot. Error rates and **ballot exhaustion** (votes that stop counting) are disproportionately higher in lower-income, lower-education, and minority precincts. This silences voices rather than empowering them.

2. Opaque Tabulation and Counterintuitive Outcomes

Multi-round eliminations and preference transfers can produce results where the candidate with the most first-choice votes loses. Final-round “majorities” are often artificial because exhausted ballots are discarded. Ties broken by lot and complex round-by-round reporting make outcomes harder for average citizens to understand or verify. In local elections, where transparency builds trust, this opacity is especially damaging.

3. Increased Costs to Taxpayers

Implementing RCV requires software upgrades, longer ballots, voter education campaigns, poll worker training, and more complex tabulation and audits. Jurisdictions have reported upfront costs ranging from tens of thousands to millions of dollars, plus recurring expenses for printing and administration. Rhode Island municipalities — already facing budget pressures — would bear these costs with little evidence of long-term savings, particularly since most do not currently use separate runoffs.

4. No Compelling Local Need

The bill’s legislative findings claim RCV addresses “spoiler” effects and reduces polarization. However, empirical evidence is mixed at best: modest or temporary increases in candidate entry, no consistent reduction in negativity, and no transformative boost in turnout or diversity. Local elections already allow broad participation. Problems like low turnout are better addressed through better civics education, accessible voting, and restoring trust in simple, transparent systems — not by layering on complexity.

To increase confusion, you would need to educate RI voters why ballot styles are different for statewide and Federal elections versus local elections. This idea will only decrease participation and voter confidence which is at an all-time low in RI.

5. Patchwork System and Slippery Slope

Allowing RCV on a city-by-city basis creates a confusing patchwork: some towns use traditional voting while neighbors use rankings. This fragments election administration, confuses voters who move or vote across jurisdictions, and invites future pressure to expand RCV statewide. Seventeen states have already banned or restricted RCV due to these exact concerns.

6. Erosion of Election Integrity and Public Confidence

Complex systems with detailed ranking data and algorithmic redistribution invite disputes, conspiracy theories, and challenges. Rhode Islanders deserve elections that are straightforward, auditable by hand if needed, and easily understood by every voter — not experimental methods rejected or abandoned in multiple jurisdictions.

<https://responsivegov.org/statement-voters-reject-ranked-choice-voting-rcv-in-seven-states-protect-rcv-in-alaska/>

<https://thefga.org/blog/these-states-are-banning-ranked-choice-voting-yours-should-too/>

<https://news.ballotpedia.org/2024/07/16/more-states-banned-ranked-choice-voting-in-2024-than-any-other-year/>

<https://www.themainewire.com/2026/04/ranked-choice-voting-expansion-unanimously-declared-unconstitutional-by-maine-supreme-court/>

Rhode Island should prioritize **simple, secure, and transparent** elections that every citizen can trust and participate in without advanced instruction. Local control is valuable, but the General Assembly should not facilitate the adoption of a voting method with well-documented flaws in usability, cost, and clarity.

I urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to **reject S 2951**. Focus instead on reforms that strengthen election security, increase adult voter participation, improve civics education, and maintain the integrity of Rhode Island's traditional voting system.

Thank you,
Mrs. Sara Vieira

<https://ondofn.com/>