Honorable Members of the Rhode Island House Committee on State Government and Elections:

My name is Andrew Mangione, Senior Vice President of AMAC Action, the Association of Mature American Citizens' (AMAC) advocacy affiliate. As the leading alternative organization for Americans who are age 50-plus, AMAC represents more than 2.1 million members nationwide and over 3,120 members in the great state of Rhode Island.

AMAC members care strongly about election integrity and the need for free and fair elections. For this reason and on behalf of our Rhode Island members, AMAC Action opposes HB 7540, a measure promoting the use of ranked-choice voting in the state of Rhode Island.

As previously mentioned, AMAC represents Americans aged 50-plus, and time and again; the evidence shows that ranked-choice voting hurts the democratic process, especially those over age 50 who have spent more than 30 years using the simple and effective one-person, one-vote system. My testimony will outline the problems created by the ranked-choice voting system.

First and foremost, we must look at the complexity created by ranked-choice voting compared to the current system. Our current system's simplicity is its strongest feature; one person has one vote for one candidate for each open office. Ranked-choice voting does the opposite by forcing voters to choose multiple candidates, including some for whom they have little information, creating confusion. Ranked-choice voting is also more likely to lead to errors on the ballot, which creates systematic unfairness in the election.

Moreover, the complexity leads to confusion. Changing to a new, unnecessary system will confuse Rhode Island voters. Ranked-choice voting is a complex system that will disenfranchise voters who are unfamiliar with how to rank their choices. Voters should be confident in their elections; ranked-choice voting degrades that confidence.

One of the worst outcomes of using ranked-choice voting is gaming the voting system instituted by campaigns. Campaigns more familiar with the ranked-choice voting system will get supporters to vote strategically to reduce the likelihood of opponents making it through the tabulation rounds. A candidate favored by a large percentage of the electorate could see their rank voted lower because the second-place campaign urges their voters to do so, even if many of that candidate's supporters also support the first-place candidate. Gaming the system is unfair to the voters.

In addition to the undemocratic components I have already mentioned, the financial impact should not be ignored. Rhode Island has and should continue to invest in secure voting technology; however, any election using ranked-choice voting requires a much more significant investment in technology to help validate the rankings and recount the votes as candidates are removed. In addition to the technology costs, a massive voter education campaign is necessary to inform voters of the new and different voting system.

Finally, I want to raise the issue of ballot errors leading to contested elections. As previously mentioned, the increased complexity of ranked-choice voting leads to confusion for voters. Campaigns affected by the confusion have a solid case to make to their supporters that the voting system, not lack of support, caused them to lose. Already, we have seen the discord created when voters do not trust the integrity of their elections. Ranked-choice voting is not the appropriate method for ensuring fair and secure elections.

In conclusion, ranked-choice voting is a solution in search of a problem. Rhode Island already has free and fair elections based on the principle of one person, one vote. As I have outlined today, this committee should reject ranked-choice voting and continue to ensure that Rhode Island's elections remain free and fair.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for the opportunity to testify.

Andrew J. Mangione Jr.
Senior Vice President
AMAC Action