

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

I am writing to strongly encourage you to support House Bill 7540, which would implement ranked choice voting (RCV) for our state's presidential primaries starting in 2028. In many ways, the 2028 primary is the perfect time for us to try out RCV. For the first time since 2016, both major parties will almost certainly have wide-open fields for their nominations, and the competition is sure to be intense.

Ranked choice voting allows parties to form consensus around a nominee and head into the general election united behind their candidate instead of starting at a disadvantage while deeply divided. It encourages constructive, policy-oriented discussions instead of personal attacks; even if someone isn't a voter's first choice, the candidate still has an incentive to try to be their second choice – and it's not exactly a smart idea to slander a rival's character if you'd like their supporters to rank you second. Comprehensive linguistic analyses and voter polls of campaigns in Virginia, New Mexico, and California have found considerable evidence that RCV increases campaigns' civility and policy focus.

It's also worth thinking about "electability," which is often used to discourage women and people of color from running for office. The whole premise of this argument is that a candidate shouldn't run because they'll split the vote within their constituency, delivering the election to a different bloc. With ranked choice voting, that's no longer an issue. If a candidate can't win, their supporters' votes are automatically transferred to their next choices, not wasted. Robust statistical evidence from the dozens of jurisdictions where RCV has been adopted – places as politically and demographically varied as New York City, Alaska, rural Utah, and San Francisco – indicates that RCV practically eliminates the gender gap and significantly narrows racial disparities, in terms of representation in the halls of power. To have as robust an exchange of ideas as possible – especially in an election as high-stakes as a presidential primary – it is crucial to operate in a format that allows as many voices as possible to be fairly heard. That's another major advantage of ranked choice voting.

I've spoken with thousands of Rhode Islanders about ranked choice voting, and by and large the most common response I've gotten is, "This just makes sense!" Truly, it does, especially for high-stakes, crowded-field races like presidential primaries. People from Westerly to Woonsocket, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, of all sexualities, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as prominent as our two Congressmen and as humble as high school students preparing to vote for the very first time in their lives, are all part of the coalition of over a thousand Rhode Islanders who have pledged their support for Ranked Choice Voting. Let's give it a shot in 2028! Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Michael J. Garman  
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