

25 March 2025

Dear Chairman Shanley and Honorable Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee,

I write to express my strong support for H5275, which would implement ranked choice voting in General Assembly primaries.

As a campaign manager, I've seen firsthand how far our elections can stray from the issues on which they should be focused. Last summer, I managed Representative Sanchez's campaign for re-election. The race devolved into a nonstop cycle of mudslinging. Instead of constructive debates over whether the Democratic Party should move toward the left or the center, the campaign revolved around allegations of personal impropriety levied by all three campaigns (against not only the candidates but even in one case a volunteer) and comparisons of a progressive Latino to Donald Trump.

None of you, I'm sure, ran for office because you enjoy having your character attacked. It's tempting to write it off as the cost of doing business, though. But what if it didn't have to be? Time and again, studies show that campaigns in jurisdictions that switch to ranked choice voting become less negative and more issue-focused. Exit polls of voters in Santa Fe, San Francisco and Virginia all indicate that ranked choice campaigns are less negative and more issue-focused. Linguistic analyses of campaign literature and media coverage conducted by researchers at the Center for Voting and Democracy and the University of Technology Sydney corroborate these impressions. The reason for this is very simple: if you want a rival's supporters to rank you second, you'll focus on finding common ground and highlighting where you agree instead of demonizing them. (But, of course, you still have to take a stand for what you believe in — being a milquetoast candidate who tries to run as everyone's second choice by waffling on the issues doesn't cut it; if you don't have enough first choices to advance, you'll be dropped in the opening round. Winning a ranked choice election requires depth *and* breadth of support.)

And it's clear that this is what Rhode Island voters want. As the leader of Ocean State Ranked Choice Voting, a fully nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to educating Rhode Islanders about ranked choice voting, I've talked about this upgrade to the way we vote with people at the Amos House in Providence, the Ocean House in Westerly, and everywhere in between. We've signed up over 3,000 of our fellow citizens — people of all ages and all partisan stripes from all walks of life — as supporters of a tried-and-true method that millions of our fellow Americans already use and love. One of the most commonly-cited reasons why people tell us they're signing on is that they're tired of the

toxicity in our political discourse. Rhode Islanders left, right and center want to hear from their politicians about how they're going to protect their rights and ease the burdens on their wallets — not an endless debate about their representative's fidelity to their spouse.

For all these reasons, I strongly urge you to vote to advance H5276. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Garman
Director, Ocean State Ranked Choice Voting
22 Burnside Avenue, Newport