

25 March 2025

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

On behalf of Ocean State Ranked Choice Voting, I write to express my strong support for H5276, which would implement ranked choice voting in Rhode Island's presidential primaries.

As the leader of a 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. Wherever we go — whether we're clipboarding at a farmers' market, tabling at a Pride festival, or presenting to a town party committee — the question we get the most is the same: "This makes so much more sense than what we do now; why don't we have it already?" Again and again, we see with our own eyes what the data consistently show — over 90% of voters *in every single demographic* find ranked choice voting easy to understand, and virtually all of them want us to use it!

The presidential primary, on which H5276 focuses, is an excellent opportunity for our state to experiment with ranked choice voting. Presidential primaries are high-stakes contests from which parties must emerge united or face serious challenges in November. This will be especially true in 2028, an election for which neither major party has a clear standard-bearer. Ranked choice voting incentivizes candidates to find common ground and focus on substantive policy issues instead of mudslinging in order to earn the support of a true majority of the voters. (As a Democrat, I'm certainly not interested in yet another toxic primary leaving our party fighting amongst ourselves instead of standing united!) And it ensures that every single one of those voters' voices is heard — with ranked choice voting, people who vote early or by mail no longer have to worry about wasting their vote if their favorite candidate drops out before primary day, which happened to over 9,000 Rhode Islanders in 2016 and 2020.

Another benefit of implementing ranked choice voting on a trial basis for the presidential primary is that it is conducive to an especially smooth implementation process. It is, of course, the only race on the ballot, which means that we can test out designing ranked choice ballots without the concerns that the Board of Elections has previously raised about confusion related to presenting voters with a mix of ranked-choice grids and traditional pick-one segments or the extra expense of printing additional ballot

pages. We won't even need to buy new tabulators — according to the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, ours are already capable of running ranked choice tabulations and would simply require a new software package. Moreover, ranked choice voting in the form proposed by H5276 is compatible with the risk-limiting audit requirement stipulated by §17-19-37.4. Passing the bill this year will give us almost three whole years to prepare and ensure that everything is ready to go in April 2028.

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