

Testimony from: Tony Jones
In SUPPORT of establishing Ranked-Choice Voting in Rhode Island

May 31st, 2023

Non-Plurality Voting Commission

Chair Senator Samuel D. Zurier, and members of the committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony today and for your hard work and dedication to serving on the Non-Plurality Voting Commission.

Thanks to Capitol Television video on demand, I have been able to keep up to date with each of the meetings and I am very excited about potential reforms, as well as to see what the commission will report in the fall.

I come to you today not only as a concerned citizen, but also as a past candidate for public office, and specifically, as a supporter of ranked-choice voting.

There is substantial value in voters having input into who represents them, even if the eventual winner isn't their first choice and ranked-choice voting empowers voters by allowing their preferences to be more closely aligned with electoral outcomes.

As the commission has seen, in a ranked-choice voting election, voters express their preferences by rank-ordering the candidates. Voters answer more than just "who is your favorite candidate?" Rather, they answer "how do you feel about each candidate relative to the others?" The difference between these questions may seem subtle, but the result is substantially more power for voters.

If voters are comfortable with more than one candidate, they can say so. If they prefer a lesser-known candidate, they can show support without worrying about the spoiler effect. And because

the ranked-choice voting vote-tallying system will continue until one candidate reaches majority support, voters have more opportunities to contribute to that victory.

Ranked-choice voting can also create better incentives for elected officials. In order to win a contested ranked-choice voting election, candidates cannot rely just on the passionate support of a narrow slice of the electorate. Rather, the structure of a ranked-choice voting election can often require winning candidates to earn first-, second- or even third-place votes from a broad coalition of voters. As a result, candidates are incentivized to run on a platform that is broadly appealing, including to voters who prefer another candidate first. Once in office, elected representatives are rewarded for remaining in touch with their entire constituency and not just their political base.

Ultimately, ranked-choice voting can encourage a more accountable government and a healthier election culture.

Thank you again for your time,

Tony Jones

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