

## **Testimony: Ranked Choice Voting is a Threat to the Integrity of Connecticut Elections**

### **One Voter, One Vote.**

Connecticut is facing many challenges right now, but the way we vote should not be one of them. Proponents of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) argue that it will make our elections fairer, more inclusive, and more democratic. But that claim falls apart under scrutiny. RCV is not just a different way to vote—it's a radical departure from the principle that has been at the foundation of American elections for nearly two and a half centuries: **One Voter, One Vote.**

In Connecticut, we already have a robust electoral system. Six political parties can appear on the ballot, each with the opportunity to rally support, present their ideas, and make their case to the voters. In a traditional election, candidates compete for a simple, clear-cut victory: the candidate who receives the most votes wins. Every vote is counted with equal weight, and the outcome is decisive. But with RCV, this straightforward process becomes convoluted, diluting the principle of a single, direct vote for a single candidate.

### **Confusion and Complexity Harm Voters**

RCV introduces unnecessary confusion into an already complex electoral process. Instead of casting a single vote, RCV asks voters to rank candidates in order of preference. This sounds simple in theory, but in practice, it burdens voters with the responsibility of evaluating every candidate on the ballot. Most people need help to form strong opinions about more than one or two candidates; asking them to rank a dozen in order of preference is unrealistic and even unfair. Studies show that many voters, unsure how to rank candidates they know little about, will leave these choices blank.

When voters don't rank every candidate, it leads to a phenomenon known as "ballot exhaustion." If all the candidates a voter has ranked are eliminated in earlier rounds of counting, that ballot is thrown out—it no longer counts. This effectively disenfranchises voters, silencing their voice in the final outcome of the election. A New York City primary in 2021, conducted with RCV, saw over 140,000 ballots discarded due to ballot exhaustion. That's 140,000 people who went to the polls expecting their vote to matter—only to be effectively erased from the results.

### **Delays and Uncertainty Undermine Trust**

RCV doesn't just confuse voters; it also introduces delays and uncertainty into the process. With RCV, elections can require multiple rounds of counting, stretching the process over days or even weeks. In New York City's 2021 primary, it took three weeks to declare a winner after eight rounds of counting. In Alaska's 2022 primary, two weeks passed before the final outcome was clear. In an era when trust in elections is already precarious, RCV's drawn-out process only feeds public skepticism.

An election system that can't deliver swift, decisive results is a system that risks losing the confidence of the people it serves.

### **RCV Does Not Reflect the Will of the People**

One of the most troubling aspects of RCV is that it can produce winners who lack a clear mandate from the electorate. Under RCV, it's entirely possible for a candidate who receives the most first-choice votes to lose the election after lower-ranked votes are reallocated. This process allows candidates to win based on second, third, or even fourth-choice rankings rather than on direct support from most voters. The winner of an RCV election might only have a lukewarm plurality of support rather than the solid majority that a traditional election requires.

This undermines the legitimacy of the election. How can a candidate claim a mandate when most voters didn't choose them as their first choice? RCV ultimately diminishes the power of each vote, muddying the results and diminishing public trust in the winner's legitimacy.

### **RCV Is a Solution in Search of a Problem**

RCV advocates often frame it as a form of "election reform," but it's a complicated fix for a problem that doesn't exist. Connecticut's current electoral system isn't broken. We have a healthy array of candidates, competitive races, and a transparent, efficient voting process. RCV proponents argue that it will make elections "fairer" by giving lesser-known candidates a better shot at winning. But is that really what we want? RCV effectively lowers the bar for winning, allowing candidates with fringe ideas or minimal public support to succeed by siphoning off

lower-ranked votes rather than earning genuine, first-choice support from most voters.

Elections are about making hard choices between candidates with competing visions. RCV blurs these choices, making it harder for voters to distinguish between severe contenders and marginal candidates. By allowing candidates to win based on second or third-choice rankings, RCV encourages mediocrity and muddles the distinction between frontrunners and those who don't have a realistic chance of leading.

### **The Cost of Complexity Is Voter Disenfranchisement**

It's not just hypothetical: RCV has a proven record of increased ballot spoilage due to voter mistakes. The instructions for ranking candidates are more complicated than traditional voting, leading to more spoiled ballots—ballots that are tossed out because voters made mistakes while navigating this convoluted system. In practical terms, this means more Connecticut voters could see their voices go unheard.

The evidence is clear: RCV is a misguided, convoluted system that disenfranchises voters rather than empowers them. It violates the longstanding principle of One Voter, One Vote, which has guided American elections since the founding of this country. Connecticut's leaders should focus on the real issues facing our state—not on experimenting with an election system that will make it harder for citizens to understand the process, trust the results, and feel confident that their vote truly counts.

*Let's not trade clarity for confusion, decisiveness for delay, or genuine representation for a false sense of choice. Ranked Choice Voting is not the way forward for Connecticut. It's time to put this misguided experiment to rest and recommit to our traditional voting system's simplicity, integrity, and fairness.*

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