CONNECTICUT LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

TESTIMONY **IN SUPPORT** OF **RCV**

November 8, 2024

To: CT Governor's Ranked-Choice Voting Working Group

From: Mike Urgo, President, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters

As I write this testimony, I am uncertain of the outcome of the 2024 presidential election, but one thing remains painfully clear: our elections, whether at the national or local level, are plagued by divisiveness and hostility. This environment discourages cooperation and undermines faith in our political system.

I'm sharing this from personal experience. In 2016, I was approached to run for the office of First Selectman in my community after years of volunteer work, including chairing a school modernization initiative. With no other candidates stepping up at the time, I decided to pursue this role. I was advised by many people in town to affiliate with a political party to make it "easier." I chose not to do this. While my path was ultimately successful and I twice won election, it exposed me to the troubling aspects of our current system. I witnessed firsthand how political affiliations could divide us, turning good people into "opponents" rather than collaborators. I often saw rhetoric that was despicable and set a poor example for our youth. This is not how it should be. It's important to recognize that this isn't just a town issue or a party issue; friction exists across towns and political affiliations, highlighting a systemic problem that we must address for the health of our democracy.

Our current electoral system often places barriers in the way of people who don't fit neatly into party lines, pressuring candidates (and voters) to sacrifice their values to align with party platforms. This discourages diversity and authenticity in our leaders, which we sorely need in today's polarized political climate. We should encourage people to run for office without forcing them to sacrifice the things that make them who they are.We need to remove the barriers that discourage public service.

Now, as President of the League of Conservation Voters, I advocate for Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) because I believe it's a way to achieve a

fairer and more inclusive system. Our Connecticut communities have unique needs, and as such deserve the opportunity to vote for candidates based on their values and merits. RCV provides this opportunity by empowering voters to support their true preferences without fear of "wasting" their votes. When voters can rank their choices, it eliminates the spoiler effect and opens the door to candidates with broad appeal.

RCV will also transform campaign dynamics. In an RCV system, candidates are encouraged to build consensus and appeal to a broader audience, fostering positive, issue-focused campaigns instead of resorting to negative attacks. This change would create a healthier political environment and inspire more people to serve—a factor often overlooked, but critical to our democracy. Public service shouldn't mean sacrificing who you are to fit a mold; it should be a path open to all who care deeply about their communities.

I urge this workgroup and the State of Connecticut to lead the way by enacting these reforms in the 2025 legislative session. We've seen the successes of RCV in other states and cities, where it has brought more positive, inclusive, and representative outcomes. Connecticut can and should join this movement to strengthen our democracy, ensuring that our elections reflect the true will of the people.