

TESTIMONY OF BENJAMIN PROTO, CHAIRMAN, CONNECTICUT REPUBLICAN PARTY

Members of the Rank Choice Voting Task Force.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of whether Rank Choice Voting (RCV) should be implemented in Connecticut for municipal elections, in particular, but also for possible future consideration for state and federal elections.

Connecticut is unique among the states. Connecticut and Rhode Island are the only two states that do not have a county or regional government system. Connecticut, as you know, is comprised of 169 separate and distinct municipalities. Ranging in population size from our smallest town, Union with a population of approximately 800 people, to Bridgeport with a population of approximately 148,000 people. Each town has two Registrars of Voters, who are elected by the voters of their towns¹. These individuals who serve as the ROV, while dedicated to their jobs, are not professionals in election administration, are often older and, in many of our towns, do not serve in a full-time capacity.

Municipal elections in many of our towns and cities have multiple offices that town voters are called upon to cast votes. In a few towns, the local legislative bodies can be a few hundred individuals. Attempting to create a RCV system for these offices would be a nightmare, not only for the ROVs but, more importantly, for the voters. Confusion, misunderstanding, disinterest, and anger will undoubtedly be part of any RCV at this level.

In addition, the creation of ballots for these towns would be multiple pages, leading to voter exhaustion and lack of participation. The exact opposite of what some on this Task Force think RCV would accomplish.

Further, the concept of minority representation is also unique to Connecticut municipalities. After multiple ballots, and winners are determined, town officials would then have to inform certain of the winners that, even though after multiple counts, and their prevailing they cannot sit on that board or commission because their seating on that board or commission would put the board or commission out of balance. This would create even greater anger and confusion and ultimately drive voters away from wanting to participate.

We just implemented early voting and, while it proved to be overwhelming successful with voters, the costs incurred by the towns were far beyond any estimates. To now add this additional cost to the towns, and additional lag time in determining results, will further erode the confidence of voters in our elections and our election officials.

The next issue that would need to be addressed is the issue of minor parties and cross endorsements.

¹ In reality, each Town Committee endorses an ROV candidate and, while a primary can be held to determine the ultimate nominee of each party, once the nominee is determined that person, upon receiving one vote at the general election, becomes that Party's Registrar of Voters.

In 2022, Governor Lamont appeared on three lines, Democrat, Working Families and Griebel/Franks line. If RCV had existed in 2022, could a voter had made Governor Lamont their first, second and third choice? If so, that seems to defeat the purpose of RCV. If not, Connecticut would have to do away with fusion voting.

We saw the mess of the NY City RCV fiasco of 2021. Delayed returns, winners becoming losers, losers becoming winners, voters becoming disenfranchised because of the voter only voting on a few choices.

Given the lateness of our primaries in Connecticut (2nd week of September for municipal elections and 2nd week of August for state elections) reducing the time to determine winners reduces the time candidates have to campaign in the general election.

In short, RCV is not a system that works well in a political geography that is not regionalized, and which is not managed by full time professional election officials. Further, on a statewide basis, it would require a Constitutional Amendment, which too many politicians look to do on much to regular a basis.

The voters recently approved “no-excuse” absentee ballot amendment which, in reality opens to the door to, and I fully expect to see politicians fighting to get through that door, mail in voting and ballot harvesting.

Rank choice voting will be hard enough to explain to voters who appear in person, imagine the chaos when they are trying to figure it out home with no help, and how unscrupulous political operatives can take advantage of

I ask the question that I asked on the no excuse amendment, “Why is this needed”? The question is not why do we want it, but what problem is this solution seeking out? Connecticut’s elections have worked very well for multiple centuries. Why do we need this change?

I appreciate the Working Group’s time and would be happy to provide any additional information which the Group may be interested in receiving.

Thank you

Ben Proto
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