

Dear Co-Chairs Hwang and Osten, Vice Chair Frank, and Honorable Working Group Members,

My name is Michael Garman, and I am a student in New Haven. I write to express my strong support for the proposed authorization of ranked choice voting (RCV) in municipal and primary elections.

Over the past several years, I've spoken to thousands of young people about their concerns about the future. One of the most common sources of anxiety is the future of our democracy. The toxicity of national politics has filtered down to the local level, frustrating those of us who would rather see candidates discuss the issues than call each other names. Elected officials often scrape by with small fractions of the vote, undermining their perceived mandates and limiting their ability to govern effectively. The fact that turnout is stunningly low – in New Haven, our municipal elections are never decided by more than a quarter of the voters, and often by fewer than 20% of those registered – only exacerbates this problem.

Fortunately, RCV offers us a path forward. Polls and sentiment analyses indicate that adopting the system is associated with a shift toward a less negative, more issue-driven style of campaigning. The fact that candidates must be preferred by the majority of the electorate does not necessarily change who wins – research by organizations such as FairVote indicates that so-called “come-from-behind” victories occur about 7% of the time in single-winner ranked choice elections – but it certainly does provide much stronger evidence of popular support for elected officials, strengthening their legitimacy and capacity to adopt their programs. This is exactly how democracy should work – elections should have consequences, and the victors, no matter who they might be, should be empowered to carry out the wishes of their constituents. Higher voter turnout is also key, and the bulk of the evidence suggests that RCV is associated with progress in that direction.

To restore trust in democratic institutions, we must ensure that they are functioning properly. There is no silver bullet that will magically solve every issue we face, but implementing ranked choice voting is the single most important step we can take to ensure that we focus on discussing those issues and engaging all communities in the democratic process. This, above all else, is why I implore you to recommend in the strongest possible terms that the General Assembly authorize interested municipalities and parties to implement RCV.

Sincerely,
Michael J Garman
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