November 2, 2024

Dear Members of the Governor's Working Group on Ranked Choice Voting,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Rank The Vote. We have long advocated for reforms that give voters more expression in their choices, reduce political divisiveness, and create opportunities for leaders who truly represent the will of the people. Today, we urge the Working Group to recommend to the Governor and the Government Administration & Elections Committee that they move forward with Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) legislation to improve Connecticut's electoral system. Specifically, we support enabling RCV for presidential primaries, party primaries, and as an option for municipalities that choose to adopt it. RCV is a transformative solution to the issues of gridlock, polarization, and negativity that have plagued our democracy.

Our current voting system is a significant contributor to these issues. As discussed in the Working Group's June 19th meeting, our traditional "pick-one" plurality voting fails to represent the full diversity of voter preferences. Too often, candidates are elected without majority support, and voters are left feeling disenfranchised and frustrated. Research also highlights the limitations of this system. The report *Ranked Choice Voting Benefits Candidates and Voters of Color* (FairVote, 2024) emphasizes that RCV reduces the spoiler effect and vote-splitting, which are inherent flaws in plurality voting. These issues not only impact candidates but discourage new voices from entering the political arena. RCV eliminates these flaws by allowing voters to rank candidates according to preference, ensuring that elected leaders have the broadest possible support (FairVote, 2024).

The consequences of our current system extend beyond election results—they erode the very foundation of our communities and foster division among citizens. By pitting candidates directly against each other, "pick-one" voting encourages candidates to campaign on divisive issues, often attacking their opponents to secure votes rather than seeking common ground. The August 29th meeting of the Working Group addressed how RCV can change this dynamic. By giving candidates a reason to seek support beyond their base, RCV incentivizes them to build coalitions and work towards solutions that appeal to a broader constituency. As candidates aim to earn second- and third-choice votes, they are more likely to focus on unifying issues and bridge divides, thereby reducing the negative campaigning that has alienated so many voters.

Ranked Choice Voting has also been shown to increase voter satisfaction and engagement. In Maine and Alaska, jurisdictions that have adopted RCV, voters reported feeling more empowered to vote according to their true preferences without the fear of "wasting" their vote. *The Civic Benefits of Ranked Choice Voting* (CLC, 2018) found that RCV gives voters more meaningful choices by allowing them to rank candidates based on true preference, rather than strategic considerations. In the Working Group's August 7th meeting, members discussed how RCV allows voters to express a broader range of views on their ballot, which can increase turnout and deepen the public's connection to the democratic process. For Connecticut, this could mean a shift toward a more representative, engaged electorate—one that feels its voice is heard in every election.

The implementation of RCV also brings substantial logistical and economic benefits, particularly at the municipal level. As discussed in the Working Group's September 25th meeting, cities like San Francisco and Oakland have seen significant cost savings by eliminating the need for costly, low-turnout runoff elections. *Instant Runoffs: A Cheaper, Fairer, Better Way to Conduct Elections* (FairVote, 2023) notes that RCV replaces the runoff process with a single, decisive election, saving municipalities time and resources while achieving the same outcome. For Connecticut's towns and cities, this efficiency would not only reduce costs but also simplify the voting process, ensuring higher engagement and accessibility for all voters.
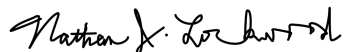
As a trusted organization in election reform, Rank The Vote understands that Americans are fed up with toxic politics and an unresponsive, gridlocked government. RCV addresses the source of the problem by re-envisioning how we elect our leaders. Connecticut's adoption of RCV in presidential and party primaries, as well as a municipal option, would be a monumental step toward a system that encourages leaders to govern with broader support. This reform would reduce the incentives for pandering to partisan extremes and instead promote unity and collaboration, both during and after campaigns.

In a climate where "hold your nose" votes have become common, RCV offers a refreshing alternative. It gives voters the ability to express their full range of views, ranking candidates in the order they prefer and selecting those who reflect their values. The Working Group's deliberations have demonstrated a clear commitment to understanding how RCV fosters more positive campaigns, encourages compromise, and provides a solution to the frustration so many voters feel with "business as usual" politics.

In closing, we urge this Working Group to recommend a legislative path forward for Ranked Choice Voting in Connecticut. RCV addresses the fundamental flaws in our current voting system and provides a viable path toward a more functional, inclusive, and positive political climate. Connecticut has the chance to lead the way in restoring faith in the democratic process and ensuring that all voices are represented.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nathan X. Lockwood

Nathan Lockwood, Executive Director, Rank The Vote www.rankthevote.us
nathan.lockwood@rankthevote.us
(617) 501-6534

References:

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