

PAUL A. GARLINGHOUSE TESTIMONY

Distinguished members of the working group, thank you for devoting time and study to Ranked Choice Voting for Connecticut. I am asking you to favorably consider ranked choice voting for Connecticut. Ranked Choice Voting can seem strange at first and a bit hard to wrap your head around, but bear with me. There is a real benefit to democracy once you get through the details.

I am a member of the Connecticut Green Party, but I am addressing you in my capacity as a concerned citizen. Ranked Choice voting allows for efficient and fair elections when there are more than two candidates. It increases voter choice and eliminates the spoiler effect.

Broadly speaking, the ranked-choice voting process works as follows for single-winner elections:

Voters rank the candidates for a given office by preference on their ballots.

If a candidate wins an outright majority of first-preference votes (i.e., 50 percent plus one), he or she will be declared the winner.

If, on the other hand, no candidates win an outright majority of first-preference votes, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is eliminated.

All first-preference votes for the failed candidate are eliminated, lifting the second-preference choices indicated on those ballots.

A new tally is conducted to determine whether any candidate has won an outright majority of the adjusted voters.

The process is repeated until a candidate wins a majority of votes cast.

With ranked-choice voting you can vote for your favorite candidates without any worry about "wasting your vote," "splitting the vote" or "spoiling" an election. It's simple: You can rank your 1st choice, 2nd choice, and so on, and if your 1st choice doesn't win, your vote goes to your 2nd choice. This process continues until one candidate wins a majority - and they can't win with less than 50%, which has happened in 4 of the last 8 Presidential elections.

Voter satisfaction is higher because a winning second or third choice has to be acceptable to a large number of voters to win. Higher voter satisfaction increases trust in government.

In Green Party internal elections we have used rank choice voting for years. While it does require some voter education to understand how to properly use ranked choice voting, it

provides more satisfactory election results, particularly when there are more than two candidates for an office.

In Connecticut we have increasing numbers of races with more than two candidates. That is the right direction for our state. It is not really an election if there is only one candidate on the ballot. It is not really a democracy if only two parties are able to effectively compete for office.

Many eligible voters do not choose to vote because they are unhappy with the choices. Many do not think their vote will matter. Sadly they are often correct, especially when there is only one candidate.

Ranked choice voting does not solve all those problems, but it gives the voters more choices. We can look at a recent election in Alaska, where they adopted ranked choice voting, to see how this can work.

In Alaska undeclared voters make up close to 60% of the electorate (Anchorage Daily News Nov 3, 2024.) In 2020 Alaska voters adopted ranked choice voting. When longtime Republican Congressman Don Young died in office, a special election was held to fill his vacant House seat. Many candidates competed in an open Ranked Choice primary. Among the top four finishers were Democrat Mary Peltola, Sarah Palin and Nick Begich. A fourth candidate dropped out and endorsed Peltola, who ultimately won, becoming the first Native Alaskan congresswoman elected in that state.

Connecticut voters responded enthusiastically to the new early voting opportunity with heavy turnout, but we still have too many voters who simply don't cast a ballot. You should recommend moving ahead with RCV and voter education to help voters understand the new process.