

Testimony on Ranked Choice Voting and Its Implications for Connecticut

Good morning, members of the Ranked Choice Voting Working Group. My name is Roger Senserrich, and I am the Policy and Communications Director for the Connecticut Working Families Party (WFP). WFP is a progressive, independent political party that fights for economic, racial, and social justice. We work to advance policies that support working families and advocate for a democracy that is inclusive, accessible, and fair.

I'm here to share our concerns regarding the potential implementation of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in Connecticut. While RCV has been promoted as a way to expand voter choice and enhance democracy, we believe it presents significant challenges that could undercut our values of representation, accountability, and access. As we evaluate electoral reforms, we should prioritize measures that strengthen these core democratic principles, particularly for marginalized communities and third-party voices.

RCV and Political Representation

Representation lies at the heart of a healthy democracy, and it is vital that our electoral system encourages the broadest and most equitable participation. Connecticut has already embraced a powerful mechanism for enhancing representation through Fusion Voting, which enables minor parties to endorse major-party candidates aligned with their values. This system allows smaller parties to make a meaningful impact on the issues they care about and empowers voters by giving them more nuanced choices on the ballot.

Unfortunately, RCV could undermine this progress. While RCV theoretically allows voters to express multiple preferences, it does not address the fundamental barriers that grassroots and third-party candidates face in terms of visibility, funding, and media access. Candidates with greater resources and name recognition still have a substantial advantage, as RCV does not inherently increase a candidate's reach to voters. Instead, it risks marginalizing smaller candidates even further by reinforcing the dominance of well-funded, well-known candidates who can more easily appeal across a broad spectrum of votersⁱ.

Moreover, RCV's complexity can disenfranchise low-income voters, communities of color, and older voters who may face additional barriers to voting. In areas where RCV has been adopted, "exhausted" ballots—votes that are not counted in the final tally due to incomplete rankings—are disproportionately high among marginalized communitiesⁱⁱ. Instead of empowering these voters, RCV could lead to more confusion and result in their voices being silencedⁱⁱⁱ.

RCV and Accountability

A democracy rooted in accountability ensures that voters can easily understand what candidates stand for and trust that elected officials will uphold the principles of the parties they represent. Political parties serve a crucial role by presenting cohesive platforms that guide policy direction, clarify voter choices, and create alignment among elected officials.

However, RCV could weaken this foundation of accountability by shifting focus toward individual candidate appeal rather than party principles. RCV incentivizes candidates to run on personal platforms, potentially at odds with their party's values, which can lead to a fragmented political landscape^{iv}. When parties lack cohesion, voters may struggle to determine where candidates stand on key issues, leading to confusion and diminished accountability.

There is also evidence to suggest that RCV can exacerbate racial polarization in voting patterns. By centering individual candidates rather than party platforms, RCV may encourage bloc voting along racial lines, particularly when voters are uncertain about a candidate's alignment with party values^v. These dynamic risks deepening divides within communities and complicates efforts to build coalitions across racial and ethnic groups.

Strong, unified parties provide voters with clear, consistent choices and help ensure that elected officials work toward shared, long-term policy goals. Without party cohesion, our democracy risks becoming increasingly personality-driven and polarized, making it harder for voters to hold officials accountable for their policy decisions.

RCV and Access to the Ballot

Access to the ballot and a fair chance to be heard are fundamental to a just and equitable democracy. While RCV is often described as offering voters more options, in practice, it could limit access by amplifying the voices of well-funded and widely recognized candidates, leaving minor-party and less-funded candidates overshadowed. This can reduce the diversity of choices available to voters.

Additionally, Connecticut's minor-party and independent candidates already face challenges in gaining ballot access. For true access, we need reforms that facilitate broader participation without imposing additional complexity. Simplifying ballot access, modernizing candidate filing processes, and ensuring support for candidates of all backgrounds would foster an environment where every voice can be heard equally.

Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Connecticut's Democracy

To address these concerns, we propose several recommendations to improve Connecticut's electoral system and ensure that all voters have a fair and equal opportunity to participate meaningfully:

1. **Preserve and Strengthen Fusion Voting:** Fusion Voting has proven effective in empowering minor parties and giving voters a broader range of choices. Preserving this system, even if RCV is introduced, is crucial. If Connecticut adopts RCV, Fusion Voting must be safeguarded to allow minor parties to maintain their influence and endorse major-party candidates where it aligns with their values.
2. **Expand Public Financing for All Elections:** Lower the public financing thresholds and extend this support to municipal races. Public financing would enable candidates from diverse backgrounds to run viable campaigns, helping to level the playing field and prevent wealthy, self-funded candidates from dominating elections.
3. **Simplify Ballot Access for Minor Parties:** Connecticut should make it easier for established third parties to gain ballot access for all statewide races by simplifying endorsement processes and extending signature collection deadlines for both primary and general election candidates. This would ensure that minor-party candidates can participate meaningfully in the electoral process.
4. **Modernize Candidate Filing Systems:** Streamlining candidate filing, including enabling secure online submissions, would reduce administrative burdens and make it easier for minor-party and independent candidates to enter races.
5. **Raise Contribution Limits for Political Action Committees (PACs):** Increasing the contribution limits for PACs supporting political parties would provide parties with the resources needed to educate voters, particularly in more complex multiparty and RCV elections.
6. **Increase Voter Education Resources:** To ensure that voters understand how RCV works — and to empower them to make informed choices regardless of the campaign budgets of individual candidates — Connecticut should provide accessible ballot guides, voter education materials, and training for poll workers. This would mitigate confusion and help ensure that all voters can participate effectively.
7. **Consider a limited implementation:** Should Connecticut proceed with RCV, limiting its application to local executive offices would reduce the potential for voter confusion and ensure that RCV is used where voters are most likely to be familiar with the candidates. This incremental approach would allow us to observe RCV's impact on elections before considering broader implementation.
8. **Support and Expand Vote-by-Mail Options:** Expanding vote-by-mail would enable voters to thoughtfully consider more complex ballots, such as those

required in RCV elections. It would also increase accessibility for voters who may find it difficult to rank candidates accurately in a single in-person visit.

9. **Provide Training for Election Moderators and Poll Workers:** Comprehensive training is essential to ensure that poll workers understand RCV and can accurately assist voters on election day. This would prevent miscommunication and support a smoother voting experience, particularly in communities at higher risk of disenfranchisement.

Conclusion

In closing, Connecticut should prioritize reforms that strengthen representation, accountability, and access within our electoral system. Lowering public financing thresholds, extending financing to local races, and simplifying ballot access are actionable steps that will empower both voters and candidates. If RCV is introduced, it should be implemented cautiously and accompanied by measures to protect vulnerable communities and minor-party voices.

Our democracy is strongest when every voice is heard, and each candidate has an equal chance to represent their communities. By preserving and expanding the systems we have in place — like Fusion Voting — and adopting reforms that foster a fair and inclusive political environment, Connecticut can continue to lead in building a democracy that truly serves all its residents.

Thank you for your time and for considering these perspectives.

ⁱ Colner, Jonathan. 2024. “Running toward rankings: Ranked choice voting’s impact on candidate entry and descriptive representation.” *American Journal of Political Science* 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12908>

ⁱⁱ Donovan, T., Caroline Tolbert, and Samuel Harper. 2022. “Demographic differences in understanding and utilization of ranked choice voting.” *Social Science Quarterly* 103: 1539–1550. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13215>

ⁱⁱⁱ Wendland, Jay., and Erin Carman. 2023. “New or “Normal” Election? Understanding Ranking Activity in New York City’s First Ranked Choice Voting Election.” *Social Science Quarterly* 104: 591–604. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13280>

^{iv} Buisseret, P., & Prato, C.G. (2022). *Politics Transformed? How Ranked Choice Voting Shapes Electoral Strategies*. <https://isps.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/di-pb-2-3-23-v3.pdf>

^v McDaniel, J. (2018). Does More Choice Lead to Reduced Racially Polarized Voting? Assessing the Impact of Ranked-Choice Voting in Mayoral Elections. *California Journal of Politics and Policy*, 10(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5070/P2cjpp10241252> Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2gm5854x>