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Feb 28, 2024

Testimony in Favor of SB 493 Elections – Ranked–Choice Voting – Contests for
Presidential Nomination in 2028

I am submitting testimony on behalf of the Ranked Choice Voting for MD Coalition, (www.RCVMD.org) a non-partisan non-profit organization registered in Maryland that is working across the state to promote the adoption of RCV at the local, county and state levels including in presidential primaries.

RCV for MD supports SB 493 because we believe that using RCV ballots ensures that nominees better reflect voters preferences, reduce wasted votes, incentive greater civility and encourage greater diversity of candidates. RCV ballots empower voters by giving them a greater voice in the selection process and strengthen democracy by solving several major problems encountered in our presidential primary process. They include:

- 1) Toxic presidential primary campaigns. In the current system if there are multiple candidates, a candidate could potentially win with just a fraction of eligible voters by appealing to their base. RCV ensures that nominees have support from a majority of the party. It incentivizes candidates to appeal to a broader audience of voters to earn their second or third choices in the ranking process. Because of this imperative, negative campaigning and toxic messaging are discouraged.
- 2) Wasted votes. Early voting and rapidly changing candidate fields can result in votes wasted on candidates who are no longer viable. This is especially a problem for the military, residents living overseas, and other early voters. With RCV, if a voter's first choice drops out or is not viable their next highest-ranked candidate vote will be counted.
- 3) Fear of “splitting the vote”. Candidates of color often fear splitting the vote when they run against opponents of the same race or ethnicity. Candidates of color are not penalized by unintentionally dividing community support.

RCV is already being used all across the country including in Maryland, in a wide range of jurisdictions and is no longer a novel approach to electoral reform.

- Voters in 24 cities and counties – home to 10 million people – used RCV in 2023.
- Across those 24 jurisdictions, voters used RCV in 70 elections.
- Voters in seven cities voted in favor of preserving, adopting, or expanding RCV
- Six states passed RCV legislation.

By 2020 Democratic primary voters in Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, and Wyoming used RCV. Additionally, RCV was used by the Virginia Republican Party to select their nominees for statewide office and select congressional districts in 2021.

As 2024 begins, there's no doubt that RCV is on the move. It remains the fastest-growing nonpartisan election reform in the nation. Maryland can be a leader in this movement by passing the enabling legislation for the adoption of RCV for elections at every level, including presidential primaries. Passing SB493 will be an important step in strengthening democracy and empowering voters to engage in our electoral process and make their voices heard. I hope that you will support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration
Michelle Whittaker, Advisor
RCV for Maryland