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Testimony from:

Robert Melvin, Senior Manager, State Government Affairs for the Northeast Region, R Street Institute

Testimony in Support of MD SB 493, “Elections – Ranked-Choice Voting – Contests for President Nomination in 2028.”

March 4, 2024

Maryland Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Chairman Feldman and members of the committee,

My name is Robert Melvin, and I am the senior manager of state government affairs for the Northeast region for the R Street Institute. The R Street Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including reforms that promote safe, secure and accessible elections. This is the reason our organization has a significant interest in SB 493.

Regarding voting reforms, the R Street Institute is a staunch supporter of legislation that enhances the experience of eligible voters while nurturing confidence in our electoral processes. Senate Bill 493, which would use ranked-choice voting (RCV) for the 2028 presidential primary election, is one such improvement.

In this system, voters are encouraged to list candidates based on personal preference. These rankings are then used to conduct an instant run-off election, where candidates are eliminated one at a time until one candidate obtains a majority of the votes. This system helps identify the candidate with the broadest appeal and amplifies voters’ voices when choosing their elected officials. RCV allows voters to demonstrate support for more than one candidate, and they can be assured that even if their top-choice isn’t the victor, they still had input on selecting the winner.¹

The strongest feature of RCV, however, is the impact it has on the incentives of candidates. RCV encourages candidates to interact with more voters to increase their odds of being ranked above their competitors. On the other hand, plurality elections abet negative campaign tactics that focus on

¹ Matthew Germer, “Restoring Losers’ Consent: A Necessary Step to Stabilizing Our Democracy,” *R Street Policy Study* No. 240, September 2021. <https://www.rstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Final-No.-240.pdf>.



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appealing to a narrow, partisan base.² In effect, RCV presses candidates to appeal to a broader swath of the electorate.

The R Street Institute has thoroughly analyzed the use of RCV in presidential primary elections and found it specifically beneficial for voters in these contests.³ During the normal progression of presidential primaries, candidates continue to appear on primary ballots in states even after dropping out of the race. Considering that Maryland tends to hold its presidential primary elections in the spring after many candidates have been eliminated, RCV would be particularly desirable for the state.

Unfortunately, misinformation has led some to believe that a new voting system could cause confusion for voters. Fortunately, our research has shown that voters are not confused by RCV and instead take advantage of the opportunity to rank candidates.⁴ Most importantly, voters retain the ability to simply select only one contender if they do not desire to rank candidates. No one is disenfranchised by RCV. Perhaps this is why a majority of voters in Maryland strongly back instant-runoff elections.⁵

SB 493 would grant voters more power in presidential primary elections, encourage better behavior from candidates, and ensure broadly appealing winners. For these reasons, I strongly urge your support of SB 493.

Thank you,

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² Drew Johnson and Matthew Germer, "Ranking Presidents: How Ranked-Choice Voting Can Improve Presidential Primaries," *R Street Policy Study* No. 271, Dec. 7, 2022.
<https://www.rstreet.org/2022/12/07/ranking-presidents-how-ranked-choice-voting-can-improve-presidential-primaries>.

³ Johnson and Germer.
<https://www.rstreet.org/2022/12/07/ranking-presidents-how-ranked-choice-voting-can-improve-presidential-primaries>.

⁴ Matthew Germer, "An Analysis of Ranked Choice Voting in Maine," *R Street Shorts* No. 106, September 2021.
<https://www.rstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Final-Short-106.pdf>.

⁵ School of Public Policy, "Six-in-Ten Favor Ranked Choice Voting in Federal Elections," University of Maryland, April 20, 2022. <https://publicconsultation.org/united-states/six-in-ten-favor-ranked-choice-voting-in-federal-elections>.



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