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Testimony from:

Dr. Jonathan Madison, Governance Fellow, R Street Institute

Testimony in Support of SB 383, “An Act concerning Ranked–Choice Voting in Contests for Presidential Nomination and Certification of Election”

February 26th, 2025

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Chairman Feldman and members of the committee:

My name is Dr. Jonathan Madison, and I am a Governance Fellow at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy analysis and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including election reforms that advance secure, safe, and accessible elections. This is why we have an interest in Senate Bill 383.

SB 383 permits the Maryland State Board of Elections, beginning with the 2028 statewide primary election, to implement ranked-choice voting (RCV) for presidential primary contests. The bill further provides for voter education and updates to election infrastructure should the Board implement RCV.

Implementing RCV in presidential primary contests can enhance the democratic process by ensuring that nominees have broad support among party members. In traditional primaries with multiple candidates, a nominee can be selected with only a plurality of votes, which may not reflect the preference of the majority. RCV addresses this issue by allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference, ensuring that the winning candidate has majority support. This system can lead to the selection of candidates who are more representative of the party's electorate, potentially strengthening their position in the general election.¹ Moreover, since presidential primary elections in Maryland usually occur in the spring after many candidates have either dropped out or been eliminated, ranked-choice voting could be especially beneficial for the state and its voters.

By encouraging candidates to seek second and third-choice votes, RCV promotes more positive campaigning and reduces political polarization. Candidates are incentivized to appeal to a broader base,

¹ Drew Johnson and Matt Germer, “Ranking Presidents: How Ranked-Choice Voting Can Improve Presidential Primaries,” R Street Policy Study (R Street Institute, December 2022), <https://www.rstreet.org/research/ranking-presidents-how-ranked-choice-voting-can-improve-presidential-primaries/>.



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fostering coalition-building and collaborative governance.² Requiring primary winners to obtain a majority of the vote also increases their perceived legitimacy.³

The requirement for a comprehensive voter education campaign is a prudent measure to facilitate a smooth transition to RCV. Educating voters on how to navigate the ranked-choice ballot is essential for the successful adoption of this system. A clear understanding among the electorate will enhance confidence in the voting process and ensure that votes are accurately cast and counted.

The provisions for the certification and periodic review of election-supporting technology further bolster the integrity of the electoral process. By establishing rigorous standards and regular evaluations, the State Board can ensure that the tools used in election administration are reliable and secure, thereby maintaining public trust in election outcomes.

Regrettably, inaccurate information related to RCV has caused some individuals to perceive this new voting system as sowing confusion amongst the electorate. Thankfully, research we have conducted has demonstrated that voters are not befuddled by RCV and instead leverage the opportunity to rank candidates.⁴ An important consideration is that voters maintain the ability to choose only one candidate if they do not want to rank contenders. No one is disenfranchised by RCV. This could be the reason that instant-runoff elections maintain strong support from a majority of voters in Maryland.⁵

In conclusion, Senate Bill 383 proposes thoughtful reforms aimed at enhancing voter representation and confidence in Maryland's electoral process. By adopting ranked choice voting in presidential primaries, coupled with robust voter education and stringent technology standards, the state can take significant steps toward more inclusive and trustworthy elections. For these reasons, we encourage a favorable report of SB 383.

Thank you,

² Rachel Leven and Tyler Fisher, "Alaska's Election Model: How the Top-Four Nonpartisan Primary System Improves Participation, Competition, and Representation," Unite America Institute, October 2023, <https://www.uniteamericainstitute.org/research/alaskas-election-model-how-the-top-four-nonpartisan-primary-system-improves-participation-competition-and-representation>.

³ Cynthia McClintock, *Electoral Rules and Democracy in Latin America* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 29-64.

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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