Government Administration and Elections Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.:	SB-1536
Title:	AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF RANKED-CHOICE VOTING IN PARTY CAUCUSES, CONVENTIONS AND PRIMARIES, INCLUDING PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARIES.
Vote Date:	3/26/2025
Vote Action:	Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date:	3/24/2025
File No.:	

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Laurie Sweet, 91st Dist.
Rep. Josh Elliot, 88th Dist.
Rep. Steven Winter, 94th Dist.
Rep. Aundre Bumgardner, 41st Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The state of Connecticut currently has an electoral system in which voters can choose one candidate that they prefer, which would be their first choice. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is an electoral process in which voters can rank their candidate preferences on their ballots from first to last, specifying their preferences on the entirety of the ballot if they desire. To understand if RCV would work in the state, Governor Ned Lamont created a RCV Working Group in 2024, which analyzed the feasibility of RCV by engaging with the public in a wide array of discussions. Following this conclusion of this Working Group, Senate Bill 1536 would allow for political parties to have the option to implement RCV in caucuses, conventions, and primaries (including the Presidential primary). This would expand options for voters to further express their preferences in given elections.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language extends the effective date by one year as this would allow the entities involved to have more time to prepare for the implementation of ranked choice voting.

The language expands to municipal elections which would allow municipalities and nominating conventions the flexibility of choosing if they would like to implement this change.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Ned Lamont, Governor of the State of Connecticut:
Supports this bill, as Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV) is an innovating voting procedure that would ensure that each voter's preference is fully considered. RCV disincentivizes voting for a candidate that is not their first choice, and it ensures that a first-place vote for a candidate does not feel "wasted." The Governor's Ranked-Choice Voting Working Group's efforts are reflected in this bill, and this bill's set of policies avoid modifying the Citizens Election Program, and any other potential constitutional issues. RCV has been successful in a handful of municipalities throughout the decade and was implemented broadly in Maine and Alaska, which revealed that RCV in those given areas promoted consensus and ensured outcomes that reflect the full will of the voters.

Stephanie Thomas, Connecticut Secretary of the State:
Opposes this bill, as the implementation of RCV requires the Office of the Secretary of the State to implement new procedures and regulations in a short timeframe. This includes prescribing new ballot designs and instructions for elections that use RCV, establishing new processes, timelines, and guidelines for notifying the Secretary of the State of a party's decision to use RCV, and creating new specialized trainings for conducting RCV elections. The Office of the Secretary of the State does not have the staffing capacity to draft and implement those regulations by the deadline of January 1st, 2026. The Office of the Secretary of the State requests further clarification of Section 1, subsection c. The Office of the Secretary of the State also recommends that in Section 6, political parties should amend their own party convention rules to account for RCV instead of the Secretary of State. The Office of the Secretary of the State also recommends that the committee considers alternative solutions to Section 1, subsection d, as Connecticut law does not permit ties in elections to be resolved by lot. Although the Secretary of the State supports RCV, the Office does not have the capacity to ensure that RCV mandates are met while educating voters and maintaining the integrity of the election process.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Cathy Osten, State Senator, 19th District:
Supports this bill after co-chairing Governor Lamont's multipartisan Ranked-Choice Voting Working Group. Connecticut has taken the steps necessary to modernize and enhance its voting process, and RCV is the next logical step. Proper funding must be in place for all necessary equipment, software, training, and education for RCV as well.

Tony Hwang, State Senator, 28th District:
After co-chairing Governor Lamont's multipartisan Ranked-Choice Voting Working Group, Senator Hwang **supports** this bill, as it reflects the modernization of Connecticut's electoral system, thus helping move Connecticut toward a more inclusive voting process. RCV can address issues such as vote splitting, it encourages civil campaigning, and political parties would be able to hold primaries and conventions that better reflect the preferences of the electorate.

[Steven Winter, State Representative, 94th District:](#)
Supports this bill, as RCV offers Connecticut a transformative opportunity to strengthen its elections. RCV shifts campaigns toward positive, issue-oriented discourse, which is especially relevant to party primaries.

[Josh Elliot, State Representative, 88th District:](#)
Supports this bill, as this bill addresses how Connecticut runs its elections. RCV fixes the issue where candidates win with less than a majority, and it eliminates voter-splitting. The Governor's Working Group on RCV laid the foundation, and this bill takes the next logical step by applying RCV to party primaries, caucuses, and conventions, including presidential primaries.

[Danielle Chesebrough, First Selectman, Town of Stonington:](#)
Supports the bill, as RCV embodies the values of respectful dialogue and practical solutions. RCV is a solution to the country's current state of political polarization, as it encourages candidates to build broader coalitions and appeal to voters beyond their immediate supporters, instead of mobilizing their bases through negativity. RCV also ensures that a candidate has majority support. By providing the opportunity for voters to express their genuine preference, RCV will boost voter engagement and satisfaction. This bill is a measured and practical approach, as it applies RCV to party caucuses, conventions, and primaries.

[Harry Rilling, Mayor, The Town of Norwalk:](#)
As Mayor of the Town of Norwalk and its former Police Chief, Harry Rilling **supports** this bill, as he has firsthand witnessed how polarized elections can fracture community cohesion. Norwalk thrives on diversity and civic engagement, and RCV would contribute to this goal.

[Bill Finch, former Mayor of Bridgeport:](#)
Has run for various offices 22 times and wishes that he had the opportunity to participate in RCV. Public trust in government has gone from over fifty percent to barely over twenty percent in his lifetime, according to the Pew Research Center, and RCV can be a solution to increase trust.

[Art Linares, Former Connecticut State Senator:](#)
As a former State Senator, Linares **supports** this bill, as RCV provides a pragmatic, conservative solution that enhances election integrity. Crowded primaries can frequently result in nominees who secure a win without majority support, which weakens a candidate's mandate. The Virginia Republican Party successfully used RCV, resulting in strengthened unity. He supports this bill because it respects local autonomy, allowing towns the option to assess and implement RCV based on their unique circumstances.

[Chris Saxman, former member of the Virginia House of Delegates for the 20th District, 2002-2010:](#)
As a former legislator, Saxman **supports** this bill, as the implementation of RCV in 2020 for the election of the Republican Party of Virginia's chairman encouraged more candidates to come forward. RCV grew the base of the Republican Party of Virginia, and, when a candidate was chosen, the party unified around him due to a lack of lingering campaign animus.

Rick McQuaid, Town Clerk, City of Norwalk:
Supports this bill, as RCV is a practical idea that can significantly benefit cities and towns across Connecticut, including Norwalk. Serving Norwalk on the Common Council and now as Town Clerk has reinforced the idea of working collaboratively across party lines, and RCV aligns well with this approach.

Lon Seidman, Elected Member, Essex Board of Education and the Region 4 Board of Education:
Supports this bill. Political party convention delegates do not need to worry about "throwing a vote away" as they will pick a second, third or fourth choice in subsequent rounds of voting. If delegates have the right to vote for their candidates, then rank-and-file members should be offered the same opportunity in the primary.

Shirley Surgeon, Hartford City Council President:
Supports this bill, as RCV can promote healthier and more civil discourse, it can help create campaigns that are focused on community-wide issues and coalition-building, which would benefit the City of Hartford.

Mike Urgo, President, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters:
After his experience of being an elected official, Mike Urgo **supports** this bill, as it can help for individuals who do not fit neatly into their party lines. RCV will improve campaign dynamics and empower voters.

Monte Frank, Vice Chair, Governor Lamont's Working Group on Ranked Choice Voting:
After serving as the Vice Chair of the Governor's Working Group on RCV, Monte Frank **supports** this bill. This bill captures most of the recommendations that the Working Group suggested. It also highlights that RCV should not be a mandate, but instead an option, which was critical in the Working Group's recommendations.

Chip Beckett, Chairman, Independent Party of Connecticut:
Supports the bill, as RCV will allow individuals to vote for candidates that have the most suitable talent, experience, and positions for the roles they are campaigning for. Suggests that this bill should include municipal general elections, as many people find the ballot construction difficult and misleading for multi-person municipal general elections.

David O'Brien, Legislative Director, RepresentUs:
Supports the bill, as the current use of RCV in other states and municipalities has presented favorable results. In a 2024 survey of voters in Maine, eighty-seven percent of respondents reported that ranking candidates as "easy" or "very easy." A 2021 exit poll of New York City voters found that ninety-five percent of voters found the ballot simple to complete, and seventy-seven percent of voters wanted to use it in future elections. One study noted that adopting RCV was associated with a nine-point increase in the percentage of candidates from racial or ethnic minority groups; after New York City adopted RCV for primary elections, it elected the most diverse City Council in its history. Given that there is not an incumbent constitutionally eligible to run for President in 2028, both major parties could have large primaries, and RCV would be the most practical voting system for presidential primaries.

Josh Daniels, Clerk & Auditor for Utah County, 2019-2023:

Supports this bill. As an election administrator that implemented RCV in Utah, and after assisting the administration of RCV in the 2024 U.S. Virgin Islands Republican presidential caucus, RCV proved to be a beneficial option for states and municipalities. After implementing RCV in Utah, voters proved to understand ranked choice ballots. In a survey after the 2019 election in Utah county, eighty-four percent of survey respondents reported that the ballot was "easy to use" and eighty-three percent of survey respondents reported that they wanted to continue to use RCV. The election administration was smooth, ad the number of Utah cities where the city council voted to use RCV rose from two in 2019 to twelve in 2023. Recommends that states pilot the use of RCV particularly in municipal elections and presidential primaries.

Deb Otis, Director of Policy and Research, FairVote Action:

Supports this bill, as it will give parties the ability to run fairer primaries. Approximately fourteen million voters in 51 jurisdictions across the United States use RCV in public elections. RCV has given voters a greater choice and has proven to be successful in the states in which it was already implemented. RCV works for both the Republican and Democratic presidential primaries, where voter experience is the same. In 2020 Democratic primaries alone, nearly three million early voters in states without RCV cast ballots for candidates who had already withdrawn by the time ballots were counted, but several states used RCV to solve this issue and make more votes count. A median of sixty-eight percent of voters choose to rank multiple candidates in RCV elections, and when the election is more contentious, the rate is even higher. When it comes to third parties, Green Party candidates Jill Stein and Ralph Nader won enough votes to affect the outcomes in key swing states in the 2016 and 2000 presidential elections, and if RCV was used, voters could have ranked their choices, which would have impacted the final candidate chosen in the state. RCV also increases diversity, as it results in greater election rates for women and candidates of color, where voters of color are more likely to rank their choices.

Jonathan Perloe, Co-Founder, Voter Choice Connecticut:

The Voter Choice Connecticut, an all-volunteer citizens group that has worked toward bringing RCV to Connecticut, **supports** this bill. In the past few years, Connecticut has made significant progress with voting accessibility, such as implementing early voting, and joining the National Popular Vote Compact. RCV is the next step, as it assures that a true consensus candidate is elected. It increases diversity efforts, allowing greater representation of historically under-represented constituencies. This bill is also aligned with the ideals of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which recommends RCV.

Eileen Reavey, Executive Director, Rank the Vote Action:

Rank the Vote Action **supports** this bill, as RCV is a proven, simple, and effective way to ensure that elections reflect the will of the people. States like Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, Nevada, and Wyoming have already demonstrated that RCV makes primaries more inclusive and efficient, and Connecticut should follow their lead.

Anne Reed, Vice President of Advocacy, League of Women Voters of Connecticut:

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut **supports** this bill, as RCV reflects their values of encouraging maximum participation in the voting process.

Henry L. Rowland II, State Leader, Veterans for All Voters (VAV):
The VAV **supports** this bill, as veterans support RCV. Veterans often bear the brunt of political dysfunction, as their interests vary based on candidates available. Almost half of veterans do not identify as Democrat or Republican, with that percentage exceeding fifty percent in younger veterans. RCV gives veterans the opportunity to rank their choices on candidates based on the issues that most affect them, instead of having to identify with a political party. The option for veterans to vote absentee but also by RCV allows for their vote to still count. If a veteran were to vote 45 days before an election via absentee ballot but their chosen candidate dropped out at some period after those 45 days, their vote is lost. Limited internet access, unreliable mail, and prioritizing the mission make it very difficult for veterans to stay informed about campaign changes or request a new ballot, but RCV ensures that a veteran's vote remains valid even if their top choice withdraws.

Lilliana Sarju, Policy & Outreach Coordinator, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters:
The CT League of Conservation Voters **supports** this bill, as RCV will encourage candidates to fight not only for the first-choice vote, but also the second-choice vote, forcing them to find common ground.

Connor Yakaitis, Deputy Director, Connecticut League of Conservation Voters:
Supports this bill, as the urgency of the climate crisis and the need for strong environmental leadership makes it imperative that voters have proper tools to pick strong candidates.

Javier Serra, Student and Member of the Board of Advisors, Connecticut Voters First:
Supports this bill, as some observed benefits of RCV include increased voter engagement and participation, candidate engagement and positive campaigning, voter satisfaction, no spoiler effect, and a majority win. Voter engagement is amongst the lowest in the nation, as only 33.67 percent of registered voters cast a ballot in the 2023 municipal elections. In the 2024 party primaries, 7.64 percent of Republicans and 15.98 percent of Democrats participated in the selection of their party's candidates. RCV can encourage voter engagement, which could raise these figures in future elections.

Aaron Goode:
Supports this bill. When the Democratic National Committee recently convened in Washington DC to elect a new party chair and executive committee, they used a process of sequential elimination, which is facially indistinguishable from the tabulation process used in RCV. Connecticut has also used this process before, which has worked before, proving that RCV can work in the state.

Michael Garman, student based in New Haven:
Supports this bill, as RCV can best reflect the diversity of the American populace. 20.8 percent of Generation Z identifies as LGBTQ+, and RCV can help improving voter turnout if individuals feel like they are more likely to feel that they are represented.

Alden Okoh-Aduako, student based in New Haven:
As a current undergraduate student in New Haven, Alden noticed that many other voters their age were dissatisfied with their options on the ballot, feeling conflicted on whether to vote strategically or honestly. Believes RCV will increase the voter turnout, especially amongst young individuals.

Suzanne Solensky:
Supports this bill, as it can lead to outcomes that better reflect the overall population. In March of 2025, the first RCV election in Los Angeles County was held in Redondo Beach, California. The majority winner was declared without the need for a runoff election, and eighty-three percent of voters found it easy to rank candidates.

The following individuals also submitted testimony in support of the bill:
Michael Bender, Anne Bingham, John Board, Joy Bonitz, Susan Bouregy, Jason Cabral, Annabelle Davey, Jane Davey, Carl Delmolino, Lawrence Grasso, Marietta Homayonpour, Lynne Karson, Francoise Knight, Joyce Lynch, Claire Matthews, Maryfrances Metrick, Walter L. Morton IV, Janice Parker, Dominic Percopo, Joan Pritchard, Regina Pinn, Patricia Reville, Thomas Roberts, Marianne Schorer, Mark Solomon, Martha Stephens, Danielle Teplica, Melinda Tuhus, Sharon Turcotte, Patricia Vener-Saavedra, Claire Walsh, Kevin Walsh, Baird Welch-Collins, Luke Williams, Donna Wnuck, Peter Woermann, Cathy Yuhas, Gail Ledesma.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

John Fahan, Treasurer, Independent Party of Connecticut:
Opposes this bill, as RCV should be in general elections and not just for party caucuses, conventions, and primaries, including presidential preference primaries.

Jackie Homan, Greenwich Patriots:
The Greenwich Patriots **oppose** this bill and align their comments with Dominic Rapini. Connecticut's electoral systems is already robust, where six political parties can appear on the ballot. RCV dilutes the principle of a single, direct vote for a single candidate. RCV also introduces delays in elections, where its decisiveness creates a loss of confidence in the official result.

Luther Weeks:
Opposes this bill, as it fails to address issues that are critical to counting Instant-Runoff Votes (IRV's). The specification of RCV must match the software used for counting votes. This bill also avoids the issues of post-election Audits and recanvasses. While this bill addresses tie votes, it does not address close votes, and the legislature should be prepared for if a close vote requires a recount. It does not address what software could be used for RCV voting. Suggests that the bill be revised, so it addresses audits and multi-round recanvasses, the need for more time for initial counting and recanvasses, alternatives for counting software independent of voting machine vendors, consideration of the consolidation of ballots in three or more counting centers, and what the state should do if the Office of the Secretary of State cannot find the appropriate software.

Harland Christofferson:
Opposes this bill, as RCV can confuse voters and suppress participation. In cities where RCV has been implemented, like New York City, a significant number of ballots were discarded due to errors, which disproportionally affected marginalized communities. RCV delays election results, as it requires multiple rounds of elimination and redistribution. RCV can also lead to voter disenfranchisement, as "ballot exhaustion" (the elimination of voters' ranked choices is all eliminated before the final round and their ballot is discarded) leads winners to be declared with less than a majority of the original voters. RCV does not eliminate

the "spoiler effect" which is when candidates who would not win in a traditional election would end up victorious due to vote redistribution. The recent congressional election in Alaska, where a Democrat won despite a Republican-majority electorate, is an example of a changed outcome due to RCV.

The following individuals also submitted testimony in opposition to the bill:
Beverly Allen, Susan Bradford, Lisa Brinton, Jerry Cincotta, Lisa Cocco, Mona Colwell, Susan Covino, Christina D, Linda Dalessio, Ms. Marcella Kurowski, Gail Ledesma, Andrea Leshinskie, Mike Santangelo, Rise Siegel, Anonymous, Anonymous.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Patty Spruance, President, Connecticut Town Clerks Association (CTCA); Antoinette Chick Spinelli, Waterbury Town Clerk; and Mark H. Bernacki, New Britain Town and City Clerk:
The CTCA and its Clerks have concerns about implementing another change to Connecticut Election laws. A change this large would require efforts to develop procedures for education and implementation, which would take time. Given the complexity of RCV, there could be delays in finalizing vote tallies and declaring winners of races. The CTCA wonders about how tenable it would be to deliver RCV results in a timely manner for statewide distribution.

Callie Heilmann, Co-Director, Bridgeport Generation Now:
Supports RCV, but it does not empower the voters to decide whether they want to use it or not. Suggests that RCV should be partnered with non-partisan primaries, followed by a general election between the top two candidates. Also suggests that the bill should be amended so that Connecticut's towns and cities can adopt RCV for both primaries and general elections by town ballot or charter referendum. In Bridgeport during the 2024 Presidential election, over 1,800 voters attempted to do same-day registration, which resulted in Bridgeport voters waiting in line for multiple hours, some after the presidential election had begun to be called. This was a massive increase from 2016. This issue can be resolved if the Office of the Secretary of the State was given the proper budget.

   Reported by: Abigail Lockwood   **Date: 04/03/2025**