IMPLEMENTING RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN ELECTIONS FOR SENATOR AND REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS, GIVING MUNICIPALITIES THE OPTION TO USE RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN SINGLE WINNER MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, AND GIVING POLITICAL PARTIES THE ABILITY TO USE RANKED CHOICE VOTING IN PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARIES

A. THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Ranked Choice (aka Instant Run-off) Voting is a method of casting and tabulating votes where voters are empowered to rank candidates in order of preference (First Choice, Second Choice, etc.) and runoffs are conducted if required.

Modeled on federal legislation co-sponsored by Connecticut Representative Jim Himes, the proposed legislation would adopt Ranked Choice Voting ("RCV") in elections for US Senator and US Representative and would give municipalities the option to use RCV in elections where only one seat is to be filled from the candidates on the ballot. The legislation would also enable political parties to use RCV in their primary elections for US President while leaving the parties free to allocate delegates to their national conventions on whatever basis they deem appropriate.

B. THE CASE FOR RANKED CHOICE VOTING

RCV is used widely around the world, and increasingly in the United States. The benefits of using RCV are significant.

In general elections, RCV assures that elected representatives are supported by a majority of voters and not merely by an active minority as can occur under the "first past the post" or "plurality is sufficient" system of deciding elections now used in Connecticut. Where RCV has been adopted, it has increased the number of viable candidates, increased voter participation, reduced extremism, improved the character of campaigns, eliminated the risk that a vote for the candidate a voter most prefers will either be wasted or, worse, end up helping a candidate the voter affirmatively dislikes and assured that the winning candidate had the support of a majority of voters and not merely that of an active minority.

The current system has the opposite effect. Voters rightly fear that voting for anyone other than one of the top two candidates will be a waste of their vote. Under RCV, a vote for a low polling or losing candidate is never wasted; the vote is automatically counted for the candidate the voter liked next best. The current system gives undue power to the extremes and it deters unaffiliated and independent candidates from running for competing in general elections because they know they will be cast as "spoilers" and that voters will fear wasting their votes on them. RCV eliminates both problems. It attracts more candidates with a broader and more diverse range of positions while protecting and respecting the voter's preferences. The current system rewards candidates who appeal to the extremes because they can win with the largest minority. RCV curbs negative campaigning and rewards candidates who earn broad support from as many voters as possible. And, RCV increases voter participation, empowering more voters to participate in the electoral process more fully, more freely and with greater influence than they can under our current system.

In presidential primaries which often draw a large number of candidates, RCV eliminates the need to vote strategically and, instead, makes it possible for voters to express their honest preferences without fear that their vote will be wasted or will help the candidate(s) they like the least. For the same reason, candidates with similar backgrounds or ideologies don't have to worry that they are dividing support. With RCV, all candidates are incentivized to build inclusive campaigns to appeal broadly and not merely to a narrow "base." The result of an RCV presidential primary is more representative and, where the party chooses to award all of its convention delegates to a single "winner," it assures that the "winner" has the support of the majority rather than a mere plurality of primary voters.

Our existing system creates structural incentives towards extremism and against consensus problem solving. We can change that to a system where the results are a better representation of voter choice and all be the better for it.