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LD 1959

I'm contacting you in opposition to LD 1959, An Act Regarding Open Primary Elections and Ranked-choice Voting.

Political parties at every level of government choose their nominees through primaries. That's the most important decision a party can make, and an organization's most important decisions should be made by members of that organization. Joining a political party in the United States is a pretty simple procedure; it most often requires that you check a box on a voter registration form. American parties do not require membership dues or loyalty oaths. If you want to participate in a party's primary, you should at the very least be a member.

Every American citizen has a right to vote in a general election. That's where we choose who represents us in government. This is a vital task in a representative democracy and barriers to voting should be as low as possible. But this does not extend to primary elections, which are used to determine nominees for parties. A party is not a government, and your rights are not being violated if you're told you can't vote in a primary because you're not a member of that party.

Primary elections are not the same as general elections and it's a mistake to treat them that way. Political scientists sometimes refer to parties as "semi-public utilities." That is, they serve important public functions, such as determining who may run for office and who may not, but they are also quasi-private organizations that can set rules for their own memberships. Because of their semi-public roles, there are limits on their abilities to set rules for themselves, they can't discriminate on the basis of race or gender, even though many parties once did. But again, parties are not governments, and even thinking about them as democracies is problematic. They are organizations, with leaders and rank-and-file members. And their decision-making processes are not open to just anyone who wants to show up.

General elections, conversely, are supposed to be open to any adult citizen. There are many perfectly legitimate reasons for not wanting to join a party or any other organization. But that decision has consequences, such as not getting to participate in that organization's decision-making processes. Allowing Independents and Republicans to select the Democrats' next nominees, or some other combination, is a good way to destroy a party and its meaning.

I also oppose using Ranked-choice Voting in any elections, I want to see it repealed, not expanded. I urge the committee to vote "Ought Not To Pass" on LD 1959.