

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH

In Support of LD 1666

An Act to Include in the Ranked-choice Election Method for General and Special Elections the Offices of Governor, State Senator and State Representative and to Make Other Related Changes

Presented by Senator Remy

Before the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, April 24, 2025

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and Members of the Veterans and Legal affairs Committee, my name is Lani Graham. I am from Freeport and am in support of LD 1666, which takes an important step toward improving our Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and should clear the way toward best use of this system, supported by voters since 2017.

I am a Maine native. My father served in this legislature in the House and the Senate. Both my parents believed strongly in the critical importance of voting as the very foundation of democracy in our country and state. I can remember being taken to Maine voting places as a child and standing on the streets of Freeport with my father while he talked with voters and gave out Graham crackers. I have the greatest respect for each of you, regardless of party affiliation, for your courage and commitment to come here and work to support your state. Right now, that responsibility for us all is more important than ever. Our ship, the state of Maine, is sailing into a storm. We need to do all we can to strengthen her, regardless of party. Passing this bill to expand RCV is one such effort.

Due to my interest in voting, I have a long history with RCV, along with many other Mainers who believe in this system. I can remember first hearing of RCV in 2015. It was explained to me in a large group of 30 people, using dessert choices as an example. There were three choices of desserts. There was one dessert I loved, and one I detested. Though I didn't get the dessert I loved, I also didn't get the dessert I detested. Fairly quickly I came to understand that what I thought was complex, really was quite simple. Perhaps most important I learned RCV was a voting option that could prevent the election of a candidate that most voters did not want. I learned that RCV gave voters more choice of candidates. It no longer meant that I had to give up voting for my first choice just to avoid the possibility of assuring the defeat of my second choice. I learned that the vitriol that still seems to characterize our national system would be less. If a candidate was running against my first choice, I would be less likely to call my second choice "an idiot" because possibly that would be unpalatable to her second-choice followers, who would then not vote for my candidate as their second choice.

I believe in RCV as the best system for Maine. I have testified in this Legislature for it. I collected signatures in freezing cold Maine weather, I carried boxes of signatures to the Maine Secretary of State for approval, I voted for it and have enjoyed greatly the use of it

over the past few years. Despite all of that, RCV has had a challenging history, in this legislature, in other legislatures and in the courts. It's a big change in our way of doing things and many are doubtful about change even if there are clear advantages as I have enumerated. While I don't agree with the delays and criticisms, I understand them.

In one of my father's elections, he came to this legislature as the victor against another candidate in a hotly contested election, winning by only a few votes. I used to say it was only one vote and it was mine. I'm sure I would have been outraged if his majority vote had been overcome by a second-choice candidate. But clearly a large percentage of the voters in our district didn't want him in the legislature. I now see that it might have been better if another candidate more acceptable to more voters, could have succeeded.

I do believe and hope that we can move forward to expand RCV and solidify its use in Maine. It's what Maine voters want, it's a better system than most states have, and it has proved itself workable. We can hope as voters that the courts will see it our way this time. Now is the time to do everything we can to make voting in Maine as good as it can be. LD 1666 is a step in that direction. I hope you will support this bill unanimously.

Thank you for your attention.