2026 -- S 2951

S T A T E   O F   R H O D E   I S L A N D

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N   A C T

RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- RANKED CHOICE VOTING

Introduced By: Senators Kallman, Britto, DiMario, Zurier, Gu, Lauria, Ciccone, Acosta, Bissaillon, and McKenney

Date Introduced: March 04, 2026

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1   SECTION 1. Legislative Findings and Purpose.

2   (a) The General Assembly finds and declares that:

3   (l) Ranked choice voting is an election method that empowers voters by giving them the

4   option to rank candidates in order of preference;

5   (2) Ranked choice voting has been used effectively in hundreds of elections for public

6   office in the United States and around the world; and

7   (3) Allowing localities to change their current methods of election to ranked choice voting

8   may enhance voter choice, address the "spoiler" effect, encourage a greater range of candidates to

9   run for office, help reduce political polarization, and strengthen democracy by providing for

10   broader and more inclusive political representation.

11   (b) ln order to address the findings set forth in subsection (a), it is the purpose of this chapter

12   to allow local jurisdictions to adopt ranked choice voting for local elections.

13   SECTION 2. Title 17 of the General Laws entitled "ELECTIONS" is hereby amended by

14   adding thereto the following chapter:

15   CHAPTER 31

16   RANKED CHOICE VOTING

17   **17-31-1. Definitions.**

18   For the purposes of this chapter, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

19   (1) "Active candidate" means any candidate who has not been eliminated or elected.

1   (2) "Active value" (or "transfer value") means the proportion of a vote that a ballot will

2   contribute to its highest-ranked active candidate.

3   (3) "Election threshold" means the minimum whole number of votes that guarantees the

4   election of a candidate to a seat based on the number of seats to be filled. To determine this

5   threshold, divide the total number of valid votes cast, by the sum of one and the number of seats to

6   be filled, round that number down to the nearest whole number, then add one vote.

7   (4) "Inactive ballot" means a ballot that, during the round-by-round counting process,

8   ceases to count for any candidate for the remainder of the counts processed for an election for an

9   office.

10   (5) "Overvote" means a voter assigns more than one candidate the same ranking on their

11   ballot.

12   (6) "Ranking" means the number available to be assigned by a voter to a candidate to

13   express the voter's preference for that candidate. The number "l" is the highest ranking, followed

14   by "2" and then "3" and so on.

15   (7) "Round" means an instance of the sequence of voting tabulation described in §§ 17-31-

16   4(a) or 17-31-4(b).

17   (8) "Surplus fraction" means the proportion by which a winning candidate exceeds the

18   election threshold. To determine the surplus fraction, subtract the election threshold from a winning

19   candidate's vote total, then divide that number by the winning candidate's vote total, truncated after

20   four (4) decimals.

21   (9) "Undervote" means a ballot that does not rank any candidate in an election for a

22   particular office.

23   (10) "Vote total" means the total active value of all ballots counting for a candidate in a

24   round of counting.

25   **17-31-2. Application of ranked choice voting.**

26   Any local jurisdiction, by a charter amendment approved by the provisions of this chapter

27   and the voters, may allow for any local primary, general, or special election to be conducted by

28   ranked choice voting, under the rules promulgated by the board of elections. This chapter shall not

29   apply to any candidate whose sought after district represents more than one municipality, unless all

30   municipalities adopted ranked choice voting. Notwithstanding any other laws to the contrary, any

31   local body that conducts its general or special election by ranked choice voting may hold a

32   nonpartisan general election. Such jurisdictions shall not hold a separate primary election.

33   **17-31-3. Ranked choice voting ballot.**

34   (a) In any ranked choice voting election, the ballot shall allow voters to rank candidates in

1 order of preference.

2 (b) In any single-winner ranked choice voting election, the ballot shall allow voters to rank

3 five (5) candidates. Notwithstanding any laws to the contrary, in any multi-winner ranked choice

4 voting election, each voter shall have only one vote, and the ballot shall allow voters to rank four

5 (4) more candidates than the number of seats to be nominated or elected. If there are fewer

6 candidates than the number of rankings required in this subsection, the number of rankings shall be

7 reduced accordingly. The number of rankings allowed in an election for any given office shall be

8 uniform for all voters voting on that office within the state.

9 **17-31-4. Round-by-round tabulation.**

10 (a) Single-winner tabulation. ln any election for one office conducted by ranked choice

11 voting, each ballot counts as one vote for its highest-ranked active candidate. The candidate with

12 the greatest number of votes at the end of the count is nominated or elected. The count proceeds in

13 rounds as follows:

14 (1) If there are more than two (2) active candidates, the active candidate with the fewest

15 votes is eliminated, and votes for the eliminated candidate count for each ballot's next-ranked active

16 candidate.

17 (2) If there are two (2) or fewer active candidates, the candidate with the greatest number

18 of votes is elected and the count is complete.

19 (b) Multi-winner tabulation. In any election for more than one office conducted by ranked

20 choice voting, each ballot counts, in whole or in part, for its highest-ranked active candidate in each

21 round. Each ballot starts tabulation with an active value of one vote. Tabulation proceeds in rounds

22 as follows:

23 (1) Election round. If any active candidate's vote total equals or exceeds the election

24 threshold or if any candidate remains active when the number of active candidates is fewer than or

25 equal to the number of seats that have not yet been filled, that candidate is elected. If the elected

26 candidate's vote total exceeds the election threshold, each ballot that helped elect that candidate is

27 counted as follows:

28 (i) The ballot receives a new active value by multiplying the ballot's current active value

29 by the elected candidate's surplus fraction, truncated after four (4) decimals. The ballot then counts

30 at this new active value for its next highest-ranked active candidate. If two (2) or more candidates'

31 vote totals exceed the election threshold, each candidate's surplus votes are distributed

32 simultaneously.

33 (ii) The portion of the ballot's value that was required to elect the candidate continues to

34 count for that candidate in order that the elected candidate's vote total equals the election threshold

1 for the remainder of the tabulation.

2 (iii) Elimination round. If no active candidate's vote total meets the election threshold and

3 tabulation is not yet complete, the active candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and votes

4 for that candidate count at their current active value for each ballot's next highest-ranked active

5 candidate.

6 (3) Tabulation complete. Tabulation is complete if the number of elected candidates is

7 equal to the number of seats to be filled and any votes exceeding the election threshold have been

8 counted for each ballot's next highest-ranked active candidate.

9 (c) Treatment of ballots.

10 (1) An undervote is a ballot that does not rank any candidates in an election for a particular

11 office. An undervote does not count as an active or inactive ballot in any round of tabulation of that

12 election.

13 (2) An inactive ballot is a ballot that during the round-by-round counting process, ceases

14 to count for any candidate for the remainder of the counting process for an election to an office. A

15 ballot becomes inactive when all candidates ranked on the ballot have become inactive.

16 (3) An overvote occurs when a voter assigns more than one candidate the same ranking on

17 their ballot. Any candidate included in an overvote shall be treated as inactive for the purposes of

18 counting that ballot and the ballot shall continue to count for any remaining active candidates.

19 (4) During the count, a ballot shall remain active and continue to count for its highest-

20 ranked active candidate, notwithstanding any skipped or repeated rankings. A skipped ranking

21 occurs when a voter leaves a ranking unassigned but ranks a candidate at a subsequent ranking. A

22 repeated ranking occurs when a voter ranks the same candidate at multiple rankings.

23 (5) If a candidate withdraws, dies, or for any reason becomes disqualified after the ballots

24 have been printed, the candidate shall be treated as an eliminated candidate during the count unless

25 a ranking for that candidate is to be deemed a ranking for a substitute candidate, pursuant to

26 applicable law. To withdraw, a candidate or a candidate's authorized designee shall file a signed

27 letter of withdrawal pursuant to § 17-14-15, any other provisions of applicable state law, or any

28 applicable rules established by the board of elections or the secretary of state.

29 (d) Ties. Notwithstanding § 17-15-33 or any provisions of the general laws to the contrary,

30 if two (2) or more candidates are tied with the fewest number of votes, and tabulation cannot

31 continue until the tie is resolved, the tie shall be resolved by lot. Election officials may resolve

32 prospective ties between candidates prior to tabulation. The result of any tie resolution shall be

33 recorded and reused in the event of a recount.

34 **17-31-5. Rulemaking and regulations.**

1   (a) Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, the state board of elections shall promulgate

2 any rules and regulations necessary to implement this chapter.

3   (b) Such rules and regulations shall include a process to release:

4   (1) Unofficial preliminary round-by-round results starting on election night;

5   (2) Unofficial preliminary ballot-level ranking data in a machine-readable and searchable

6 open format immediately after the counting of ballots is complete; and

7   (3) Official final round-by-round results and official final ballot-level ranking data in a

8 machine-readable and searchable open format upon certification of the results.

9   (c) Such rules and regulations shall also establish a voter education program, an election

10 official training program, and a process to certify ranked choice voting counting tools for use in

11 elections within the state.

12 **17-31-6. Severability.**

13   If any provision of this chapter, or the application of any provision of this chapter to any

14 person, office, or circumstance, is held to be unconstitutional, the remainder of this chapter and the

15 application of its provisions to any person, office, or circumstance, shall not be affected by the

16 holding.

17   SECTION 3. This act shall take effect on January 1, 2027.

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EXPLANATION

BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

OF

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RELATING TO ELECTIONS -- RANKED CHOICE VOTING

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1   This act would establish a system of ranked choice voting whenever a municipality's

2   charter amendment is approved by its voters.

3   This act would take effect on January 1, 2027.

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