

In Support of HB 1391: Commission to Study Single Ballot Primary Implementation

Submitted by: Steve Brown, Dover, NH

Former Executive Director, NH Together (January 2025 - January 2026)

Chairman Berry and members of the Election Law Committee:

My name is Steve Brown. I served as Executive Director of NH Together from January 2025 through January 2026. I'm here to urge your support for HB 1391, which would establish a commission to study whether a single ballot primary system could benefit New Hampshire.

I want to be candid: I joined NH Together in January 2025, and had no role in the 2024 Citizens' Assembly that recommended this reform. I inherited the recommendation, and I was genuinely uncertain whether a single ballot primary would actually reduce polarization and increase participation, or whether it was just another well-intentioned idea that sounds good but doesn't deliver.

My job required me to understand this reform deeply. Over the past year, I immersed myself in peer-reviewed studies, real-world results from states that implemented it, and voter experiences. What I learned convinced me of its efficacy.

As you know, in the 2024 Citizens Assembly, 50 New Hampshire residents - Republicans, Democrats, and independents from every region - spent three full days studying the causes and potential remedies to political polarization. After careful deliberation, 85% voted in favor of a single ballot primary. That overwhelming consensus signaled that when everyday Granite Staters study this reform deeply, they conclude it will help reduce polarization, encourage participation, and enable elected officials to better serve all their constituents. For them, the mechanism was straightforward: when candidates must appeal to their *entire* constituency to win the primary, they adopt positions and voting records that represent their entire constituency.

The research supports these conclusions.

First, single ballot primaries increase voter participation. The Bipartisan Policy Center's 2024 study found that states opening primaries to unaffiliated voters increase turnout by an average of 5 percentage points. In New Hampshire, where only 29% participated in our 2024 state primary, that would mean 15,000 or more additional voters.

Second, they encourage more moderate legislative behavior. Christian Grose's 2020 study analyzing all U.S. House members found that single ballot primaries reduce legislator extremity by 7-10 percentage points. A 2024 study of Alaska's state legislature found that winning candidates were more likely to be centrists willing to work across the aisle, making it possible to make progress on education funding, crime, energy transmission, and healthcare.

Senator Kelly Merrick, a Republican in Alaska's Senate, wrote in June 2024: "The legislature came together to pass bipartisan legislation... These bipartisan actions have shown voters that our coalitions are working for the people of Alaska."

I'm not asking you to implement a single ballot primary tomorrow. I'm asking you to support HB 1391 to study whether this makes sense for New Hampshire, given our unique conditions: multi-member districts, first-in-the-nation presidential primary, and distinctive political culture.

A study commission would examine the evidence rigorously, hear from election administrators and voters, and make recommendations grounded in our state's values.

A 2024 UNH survey showed that 92% of New Hampshire residents believe it's important to reduce polarization. The 2024 Citizens Assembly studied this issue deeply and 85% of participants voted to recommend a single ballot primary.

A year ago, I was uncertain. However, the evidence has convinced me that single ballot primaries increase participation and reduce polarization.

I hope that, as a State, we are willing to study a reform that has worked in Alaska, Nebraska, California and Washington, and that our neighbors overwhelmingly support.

I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on HB 1391.

Thank you for your time and service.

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