

Testimony of Blair Bobier

Ranked Choice Voting

Before the House Committee on Modernizing the People's Legislature

April 7, 2001

Good afternoon co-chairs and committee members. My name is Blair Bobier and I was one of two chief petitioners, along with Representative Rayfield, for the successful ballot measure which created Ranked Choice Voting elections for Benton County. I have been a member of the Oregon State Bar for over 30 years and am a former county planning commissioner. I offer testimony on behalf of Oregon Ranked Choice Voting Advocates, a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a more reflective democracy.

I have studied elections for over 20 years and have worked with a number of nonprofit organizations advocating for electoral reform. I was involved in the successful implementation of Ranked Choice Voting in Oakland, Berkeley & San Leandro, California. I was able to draw on those experiences for our successful Benton County campaign.

Our first priority was meeting with the Benton County Clerk who would implement and oversee the election process. We continue to consult regularly with the county clerks about statewide implementation of Ranked Choice Voting.

The Benton County campaign was a community-based effort with broad support. Our campaign was endorsed by the local chapters of the NAACP and League of Women Voters of Oregon; along with all three Benton County Commissioners and a vast majority of the Corvallis City Council. Our effort drew support and volunteers from almost every political party in Oregon including the Republican, Democratic, Pacific Green, Independent and Progressive parties.

In 2016, Benton County voters approved the charter amendment to use Ranked Choice Voting to elect our three county commissioners. RCV is authorized in Benton County by both this charter amendment and the Oregon Constitution which has had a Ranked Choice Voting provision since 1908 (Article II, Section 16).

The first use of RCV in Benton County was during the November 2020 election—in 2 county commissioner races. Prior to the election, extensive outreach and education took place. While the County took the lead on this and did the lion's share of the work, nonprofit organizations augmented the effort. The County created a website to explain Ranked Choice Voting with mock candidates, mock ballots, an animated "explainer" and a detailed FAQ. The County also printed RCV information in both the May and November Voters' Pamphlets.

Our organization supplemented the County efforts with education and outreach through social and traditional media and a direct mail piece to all county voters. We coordinated with another nonprofit with whom we work, We Are Democracy Rising, to provide a free training to all candidates on how to campaign in an RCV election.

The election was a success. It went off without a hitch. The winning candidates won election with a majority of the vote even though there were third-party candidates in both races. Candidates could run without fear of “spoiling” the election and voters could cast their ballots knowing their votes would not be “wasted.” Voters were able to express their honest opinions about the full range of candidates and they successfully used the rankings (first choice, second choice, third choice) to do so. There were very significant second-choice vote totals for third-party candidates which is important information for elected officials to know.

Although there are ballot errors in every election, this RCV election saw no significant change from a standard plurality election. Voters found the system easy to use and understand and we believe that the Benton County experience provides a proven template for the statewide usage of Ranked Choice Voting.

Ranked Choice Voting has a proven track record of bringing more voices into elections and providing voters with more choices. It results in better representation, greater diversity, a more reflective democracy, and better campaigns. When used to combine primary or runoff elections with the general election, Ranked Choice Voting can also shorten campaigns, reduce the cost of campaigns, and save counties and the State money by eliminating unnecessary and low-turnout elections.

Ranked Choice Voting is a smart and simple way to improve our elections and create a democracy which will be more reflective of Oregon’s increasingly diverse electorate.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

