I urge the Rules Committee to support fairer and more accurate elections in Oregon. To do so, please oppose SB 791. This bill disregards the strongest information on effective reforms. It simply establishes an old, flawed, and complex form of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), also called "instant runoff" without consideration of the options. Advocates for RCV almost always claim (and probably believe) the idea that "if your 1st choice is eliminated, your vote moves to your 2nd choice". That assertion is simply false. Although that can happen with RCV, it also happens that a voter's 2nd choice is eliminated in an earlier round. Thus, when their 1st choice is later eliminated, their ballot is simply exhausted. They never get their 2nd choice preference counted at all. This seems counterintuitive because the very premise of ranking implies that the rankings will be considered somehow, that all voters will be treated equally. Instead, some voters have their preferences counted and others are discarded. To state again: in RCV (specifically the instant-runoff approach), some ballots are treated as exhausted without their marked preferences getting counted. This is not just a theoretical concern that applies to edge cases. The inherent distortion has led to many real elections where the winner was not the candidate with majority support.

Thankfully, election researchers have identified other voting methods that address the spoiler issues with our current system while also producing reliably better results than RCV. Approval voting is functional, fair, treats all ballots equally and counts them fully. It simply involves allowing voters to vote for more than one candidate. For better expression of preferences among candidates, the best option is STAR Voting. STAR has a strong Oregon-based public support already and is used in party elections and elsewhere here. STAR lets voters give up to 5 points to candidates, allowing the expression of more or less support. All scores are counted. STAR also performs the best of all voting methods in many objective academic studies considering many different scenarios. STAR is less expensive to administer, easier to tabulate, and it actually resolves the problems the way RCV supporters imagine RCV would do.

We need to embrace the most effective options for the long-term resilience of our state elections. SB 791 would harm that effort by locking in a flawed and outdated option. I know this argument that "we can do better" is often used by those who want to kill reforms and do not actually intend to see reforms ever happen. I do not want to be misunderstood as taking that tact. I strongly support HB3250, HB3248, HB3241, and HB3247 all of which go in the best directions by establishing Approval as default (why limit voters to one candidate only?) and supporting the potential for STAR and other ideal reforms to be considered. I support better elections. It is for that reason that I oppose SB971. We really can and must do better here.