

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Girod, and members of the Committee,

SB 791 and SB 343 are wasteful legislative proposals. They advance no betterment of Oregon citizens' welfare nor of the integrity and representativity of our elections. Instead, they promote a discredited voting technology (Ranked Choice Voting or RCV) for the sole apparent purpose of countering HB 3250 STAR Voting for Oregon. In doing so, they contribute to fueling public distrust in our political institutions and undermining our normative standards; and by now it should be well understood that these trends--amplified at the state and local levels by a multitude of similarly cynical initiatives--can have extremely dangerous consequences.

By the end of the January 2021, President Trump had reportedly made 30,573 false or misleading claims. Experts who study the societal impact of lying and corruption have been alarmed by the broader normative ramifications of such a complete breakdown of behavioral standards. "Dishonesty is contagious," noted the University of Nottingham's Professor Simon Gaechter in 2016--with profound deleterious effect on the moral fiber of a society and thus its very ability to govern itself in an orderly, efficient and equitable manner. In order to nurture the virtuous normative standards that are critical to the mere survival of a democratic society, political scientist and psychologist Professor Renshon has forewarned that politicians should be held up to a higher standard.

Election reform is among all current issues the place we we should expect members of the Oregon Legislature to show leadership, integrity and foresight. At a minimum, we should expect members of this Committee to conform to a reasonable person standard; and no reasonable person can today recommend the adoption of Ranked Choice Voting, at any level and for any purpose. SB 791 and SB 343 are wasteful and, if passed, would in practice undermine election reform in Oregon.

STAR Voting Oregon and the Eugene-based Equal Vote Coalition have already provided detailed and authoritative evidence of the many flaws of Ranked Choice Voting, especially when compared to STAR voting. It is now well established that RCV is an oversold and outdated voting concept that is expensive and complex to implement at any level, wastes votes and doesn't work well in competitive elections. It has a long history of being passed by legislatures and then repealed for failing to deliver any meaningful improvement. RCV is the weapon of choice of conservative republican legislators to defeat election reform in a cynical way that gives their democratic bedfellows deniability. But the two bills in front of this Committee are going one step further. In addition to promoting the fallacy of RCV's continued relevance to election reform, SB 791 and SB 343 as drafted would bar counties and local municipalities from adopting STAR voting -- the only voting technology that offers significant improvements over the current system, in a cost-effective and intuitive manner (as well as the only one that could be deemed "made in Oregon").

In summary, SB 791 and SB 343 merely function as a stop-gap initiative for preventing STAR voting from taking roots and building momentum. Oregon citizens deserve better than yet another legislative initiative that purposely promotes a known defective technology (that is expected to fail), that advances no other conceivable practical purpose nor delivers any betterment of our electoral democracy. For these reasons, as supported by the many technical arguments against RCV presented by the Equal Vote Coalition, SB 791 and SB 343, as currently drafted, should be opposed by this Committee.