

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

SB 343, as currently drafted, exclusively promotes an outdated, flawed and outranked voting technology (Ranked Choice Voting or RCV), with the likely result of preempting that statutory field and thus barring (or discouraging) Oregon counties and local municipalities from experimenting with more modern, cost-effective and accurate voting technologies such as STAR Voting.

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 It is now well established that RCV is an oversold and outdated voting concept that is expensive and complex to implement at any level, wastes votes and doesn't work well in competitive elections. It has a long history of being passed by legislatures and then repealed for failing to deliver any meaningful improvement.

In addition to promoting the fallacy of RCV's continued relevance to election reform, SB 343 as drafted could 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"). Oregon citizens deserve better.

A more productive approach might be to use SB 343 as a legislative starting point. Conceptually, local political entities of sufficient size and comparable demographic makeup could indeed be enticed to become Oregon's voting laboratories. But for these trials not to be wasteful, they must share a common framework and receive adequate programmatic support. Finally, these trials must focus on the most promising alternative voting technologies -- not on the first one nor the one you might have prior experience with.

Finally, while STAR Voting is currently the most promising voting technology, it could very well be outranked tomorrow by a new breakthrough. Innovation can't be foreseen and therefore should not be legislated. SB 343 may instead stipulate minimum common requirements for transparency, accuracy and representativity, possibly by reference to a report of a Task Force on Alternative Voting Methods such as the one proposed by HB 3241 (Hudson).

There is however an even better alternative: SB 343 should be tabled.

Do we really need to go through such a complex and onerous process to, then, "discover" that STAR Voting is vastly superior to RCV? Or should we instead focus our limited time and resources --already stretched thin by the cost of fighting Covid-19 and re-opening Oregon economy-- on developing a progressive roadmap for implementing STAR Voting and gradually delivering tangible voting improvements to all Oregonians?