



Date: 1/12/24

Subject: Comment on ballot title for HB 2004

To: Joint Committee on Ballot Measure Titles and Explanatory Statements

From: *Sol Mora, Oregon Ranked Choice Voting Advocates*

Dear Co-chair Senator Lieber, Co-chair Representative Holvey, and members of the committee,

My name is Sol Mora, I grew up in Salem, Oregon after immigrating from Mexico at the age of six, and currently reside in Portland, Oregon. I am the Political Director at Oregon Ranked Choice Voting Advocates, and during the 2023 legislative session, I served as the Coalition Director of the HB 2004 coalition, which is composed of nearly 40 organizations that support the bill to bring statewide ranked choice voting to Oregon.

I would first like to thank you for your time and commitment to develop ballot language that will set up all Oregon voters for success in understanding the choices on their November 2024 ballots, including the choice to consider and vote on adopting ranked choice voting for statewide and federal races.

One of the guiding values of the HB 2004 coalition has been to create a more accessible, participatory, and representative democracy for all the people who live here, from rural residents, to communities of color, to working class families. At a time when voters feel demoralized and lack faith in our electoral system, we must address the root causes of why. From the sentiments voters hold in feeling they must vote strategically for a candidate with the best chance of winning to the trends of candidates winning in Oregon with less than a majority, we must understand that voters largely do not feel that they or their interests are well-represented. We believe that by giving Oregonians a choice to rank candidates on their ballot, Oregonians will feel they have more agency in voting. Whether voters decide to only vote for one candidate, or whether they decide to use multiple rankings to rank their top candidates, this opportunity empowers voters and can help them choose candidates that they feel more closely aligned with.

This throughline of an accessible, participatory, and representative democracy continues to be our priority as we analyze the LC-drafted ballot language for HB 2004. We appreciate the work of legislative counsel and understand these drafting processes are challenging, but we have strong concerns about the substantive body of the ballot language and would like to highlight some of these crucial points to help you in your assessment of the language.

In summary, the LC-drafted ballot language does not strike us as being approachable or easy to understand for the average voter. Much of the language as written in the ballot caption, results statements, and summary is clunky, lengthy, and unclear on what the



measure actually does. It is imperative we ensure all ballot language is comprehensible, concise, and effective for voters to fully understand the extent of what they are voting on; it is even more crucial for concepts voters may be unfamiliar with, such as what we here call “ranked choice voting”. To improve upon this drafted ballot language, there should be explanations of what ranked choice voting is, how it is conducted, and how the current electoral system in Oregon functions so that voters can fully understand the new proposed system as well as gauge how it would operate in comparison to our current one. One of the key distinctions that should be highlighted is that in the current system, voters can only pick one candidate for a specific office, whereas with ranked choice voting, voters have the ability to rank multiple candidates for a specific office - but only if they wish to do so. In the current ballot language draft, there is no mention or illustration of how voters interact with the current voting method, or coherent definition of the specialized term “ranked choice voting” - both of which we feel are essential for voters to understand the change they are being asked to vote on.

Additionally, the drafted ballot caption, results statements, and summary do not adequately describe the process of how ballots are counted using ranked choice voting. Based on voter education efforts that we have engaged in previously, from virtual workshops to tabling events, community members have benefited immensely from understanding how their ballot would be counted in the new system. By explaining that the ballots are counted in rounds based on the order of a voter’s marked choices, until one candidate has a majority of the votes, this helps voters understand the full picture of how the counting process works. It also helps voters understand how the order of their rankings is connected to the round by round process; for example in the first round, their top choice is counted, and so on. Voter understanding is key to voter trust.

Furthermore, we know that Oregon, the Secretary of State’s office, and our elections officials are committed to language accessibility and the ballot language about HB 2004 is a pivotal outlet to ensure that multilingual translations can be effective. In order to translate this ballot language into Oregon’s top five most spoken languages other than English, as is required for the voters’ pamphlet, the ballot language should use descriptive and clear phrasing.

Meeting voters of all backgrounds where they are is a tangible way to reduce barriers to participating in our democracy. Overall, we hope that you will take steps to improve the ease of understanding of the HB 2004 ballot language to empower voters to make an informed decision about whether they would like Oregon to adopt statewide ranked choice voting. Being able to rank candidates is an easy to understand concept, and the ballot title should reflect that.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sol Mora

Political Director

Oregon Ranked Choice Voting Advocates