

Testimony in Support of HB 2004
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On Behalf of 350 Salem Oregon²
March 17, 2023

Greetings Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, committee members and staff.

350 Salem OR strongly supports SB 2004. My 37 years of professional experience with state government and a close following of elections for 50 years indicate it is needed.

It is imperative that the committee pass the bill with the -1 amendment with a “do pass” recommendation to the Senate floor.

Oregon has been a leader for the U.S. on many issues. Ranked choice voting is superior to the top-two primary systems of California and Washington state. Unlike these systems it allows supporters of all parties to participate in the general election. It would give voice to a majority of primary voters. Top-two primaries eliminate too many candidates before voters have begun to know them.

In any case the current system of awarding the office to a candidate that wins a plurality in a general or primary is unacceptable. It could allow a fringe group of 30 or so percent to overrule the majority of Oregonians or a majority voice in a party primary.

In our current elections, candidates in crowded races are consistently winning with less than a majority, including the governor’s race. Over half of statewide and federal races with more than two candidates won with narrow support in Oregon’s 2020 and 2022 primaries.³ Some change is needed.

¹ My Ph.D. is in Natural Resource and Utility Economics from Johns Hopkins University. From 1980 to 2017 I worked for the Oregon Dept. of Energy and Public Utility Commission mostly as a senior energy policy analyst.

² 350 Salem OR is a local chapter of 350.org, an international non-profit dedicated to reducing climate pollution and human-caused climate disruptions, such as the 2020 Labor Day Santiam Canyon wildfire, the June 2021 heat dome event and the 2023 “fir-magedon” dieoff of true fir trees in central and eastern Oregon.

³ Oregon Secretary of State, State of Oregon Elections: Election History

350 Salem OR cares about Oregon and federal policy on climate change so we care about having fair elections. Anyone who cares about policy can see the problem of a minority candidate making policy. That is not democracy.

The Oregon Association of County Clerks (OACC) opposes passage of Rank Choice Voting this legislative session. The reasons they give are variations on the theme that it would be more expensive. Other states with ranked-choice voting have not seen voter resentment.

Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. If you don't like ranked-choice voting then amend the bill to adopt a system that is better than the plurality-choice system that we have. Even top-two primaries would be better.

Thank you for your great work and for the opportunity to file testimony