March 15, 2023

Chair Fahey, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice Chair Kropf, and members of the House Committee on Rules,

My name is Jay Lee, I live in Southeast Portland, and I'm writing on behalf of Sightline Institute, a nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank in the Pacific Northwest working on climate and energy, housing policy, and election systems. I'm a democracy researcher at Sightline, which means that I spend my time analyzing how our election systems support or obstruct the will of the people.

Sightline Institute supports HB 2004 because ranked choice voting would help Oregonians elect more officials with true majority support, vote for their true favorite, worry less about spoiler candidates or wasting their vote, and see more representative and diverse ballots and officeholders. Let's briefly break down the problems with our current form of elections.

Under Oregon's current system, with almost every election having more than two candidates for voters to choose between, **candidates frequently win with less than a majority of the votes cast**. Out of the seven elections for Governor since 2000, four had more people vote against the winner than vote for them. Out of the seven Republican primaries for Governor since 2000, only one election had a majority winner. Christine Drazan won the Republican primary in 2022 with only 23 percent of the vote, which means 77 percent of voters voted against her.

Also under the current system, sometimes voters want to support third-party or less popular candidates, but they can **end up acting as spoilers**, throwing the election to those voters' least favorite but major-party candidate. Governor Barbara Roberts won her election in 1990 with under 50 percent of the vote because a conservative activist ran an independent campaign and split the Republican vote.

On the other hand, sometimes voters are **pressured not to vote for their honest favorite** to avoid situations like these—voting for somebody they think *can* win, not somebody they think *should* win. For instance, we saw dozens of Tina Kotek ads last fall telling us that "Betsy Johnson can't win" or "a vote for Betsy Johnson is a vote for Christine Drazan." Voters don't want to be told to vote like that, and candidates don't want to run like that.

Ranked choice voting would be a clear improvement on all of these dynamics. 1) Voters could vote more honestly: you could give your first ranking to a minor candidate you really liked without throwing the election to a major candidate you really didn't like. 2) More potential candidates could run for office, particularly first-time candidates, women, and people of color: you could run while worrying less that you'll split the vote with similar candidates or that voters will strategically vote against you because they think you're less "electable." And 3) parties could run stronger candidates: their nominees would come out of the primary with a stronger measure of support, and they'd be more certain that this was a candidate their members could really get behind.

For all these reasons, Sightline Institute supports HB 2004 adopting ranked choice voting for most statewide and federal elections. Voters will be better able to vote for their true favorites, more diverse candidates will run without worrying so much about splitting the vote, and parties will know that they're running the strongest candidates they have to offer our electorate.

Thank you,

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