



To: House Committee on Rules  
From: Imagine Black  
Re: Support for HB 2004 Ranked Choice Voting  
Date: March 16, 2023

Chair Fahry, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice Chair Korpf, and members of the committee:

My name is Danita Harris (they/them). I am the Deputy Director of Movement Building at Imagine Black, a culturally-specific nonprofit working statewide to build political power for Black Oregonians. Part of this mission is recognizing and supporting initiatives allowing Black Oregonians to be better represented in state government.

Because of this, Image Black supports a statewide transition to a form of voting that allows voters to express a more expansive range of preferences, ultimately leading to more informed governance. I acknowledge, however, that change can be difficult, especially since a change like Ranked Choice Voting puts pressure on the status quo. Part of imagining a better future for Black Oregonians includes better information about people's needs.

Single member plurality (sometimes called “first-past-the-post”) voting provides voters with only one option per race and often leaves voters with limited choices that don’t truly reflect their views. Around the US, we see ranked choice and similar alternatives to plurality voting implemented successfully. This is because ranked-choice voting allows voters to more fully express their wishes by determining the candidate with the strongest support across the electorate rather than the largest base. This encourages campaigns to bring the discussion from personalities to policies, allowing candidates and campaigns to build consensus rather than racing to extremes. Rather than choosing between the “lesser of two evils,” voters can rank multiple candidates in their order of preference. If their first choice is unsuccessful, they will feel more included in the process if their second or third choice is the winner.

An excellent example is the May 2022 race for BOLI commissioner. In that race, Oregonians had seven candidates to choose from. The primary results tell us little about the desires of the more than 300,000 Oregonians who did not cast a ballot for either of the top two candidates in that race. It also doesn’t tell us anything about the individuals who cast votes for the top two who would have, perhaps, preferred another candidate but made a strategic choice based on any number of other factors.

In short, ranked choice voting leads to outcomes that better reflect the will of the People, and allows more thoughtful, sincere candidates to campaign successfully. By allowing voters to express their full range of preferences and preventing vote splitting, we better understand how we should approach problems and generate solutions.



To: House Committee on Rules  
From: Imagine Black  
Re: Support for HB 2004 Ranked Choice Voting  
Date: March 16, 2023

Despite the possibilities, HB 2004 does not address the issue of centralized tabulation. Currently, each county tabulates and reports their own results. In multi-jurisdictional elections, counties file their results with one county-level filing

officer, who aggregates and certifies the results. The Secretary of State aggregates data but is not involved in tabulation at any level. With RCV, there will be at least some centralized tabulation required, namely in statewide races, and HB 2004 doesn't address how this would be handled. We encourage this to be addressed in a potential -1 amendment.

In addition, not every county has election systems that are RCV capable. At least 5 of Oregon's 36 counties currently have voting equipment that is not RCV capable, and while all hardware will need to be replaced eventually, we should be mindful of which counties will need additional funding and support from the Secretary of State's Elections Division in order to successfully implement a statewide RCV system. A state level change of this nature should bring to the center those counties that will most need information, support, and funding to be successful.

With elections under scrutiny nationwide, ranked choice voting could restore voter trust in the process while allowing them to more fully express their preferences. It is our firm belief that implementing ranked choice voting will benefit Black Oregonians statewide, and we encourage you to thoughtfully consider how and when that should occur.

Thank you,

Danita Harris, Deputy Director of Movement Building  
Imagine Black