

Subject: Support Statewide Ranked Choice Voting, HB 2004

March 21, 2023

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

I am writing as a private citizen to express my strong support for HB 2004, which seeks to establish Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in Oregon for statewide and federal offices, both for primary and general elections. RCV presents a more equitable and democratic solution to our electoral process and gives voters more voice and power in determining the outcome.

RCV has several advantages over our current system and other alternatives, such as STAR voting. It effectively reduces vote splitting and strategic voting, allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference without fearing that their vote will be wasted. Moreover, RCV incentivizes candidates to appeal to a wider range of voters and engage in more civil, issue-focused campaigns, fostering a healthier political environment.

Furthermore, RCV has a proven track record of successful implementation in various jurisdictions worldwide, including Australia, Ireland, Scotland, and several US cities and states. These implementations have led to increased representation and more diverse elected bodies. HB 2004 also establishes a local option for cities and counties to adopt RCV, paving the way for effective, multi-lingual, and culturally responsive learning tools for other jurisdictions. This flexibility allows local communities to tailor RCV to their unique needs, promoting more responsive and inclusive governance.

If time permits, I encourage you to read on to pages 2 and 3 of this testimony to understand some of my concerns with STAR voting. Much of the testimony in opposition to HB 2004 has been from well-meaning supporters of STAR, but the system gives me cause for concern.

2022 Oregon gubernatorial election comes to mind, wherein an independent candidate brought serious concerns for vote splitting. RCV helps to solve this problem.

In conclusion, I implore you to support HB 2004 and advance the cause of a more equitable and democratic electoral system for the people of Oregon. Ranked Choice Voting offers a tested and reliable solution that ensures voters' voices are better represented in our government.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Collin James Ledford

While STAR voting presents an interesting alternative, I disagree with the assertion that it is easier and more equitable than Ranked Choice Voting. I believe RCV offers several advantages that make it a more reliable and fair method for determining the will of the electorate.

Contrary to the claim that RCV doesn't eliminate vote splitting, FairVote, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for RCV, highlights that RCV helps reduce the spoiler effect by allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference [1]. This process alleviates vote splitting concerns, as votes are redistributed based on subsequent preferences until a candidate achieves a majority [2].

The argument that RCV focuses on "who can raise the most money" is an oversimplification. RCV incentivizes candidates to appeal to a wider range of voters [3]. The Electoral Reform Society found that RCV encourages more civil and issue-focused campaigns compared to other systems [4]. I also want to point out, if you think that RCV just means "spend more money telling voters to rank me first or second" that same argument can literally be used to spend money to tell voters to "give me a 5 in your approval".

Furthermore, the claim that STAR voting is simpler than RCV is debatable. In STAR voting, voters assign each candidate a score, and the two candidates with the highest total scores advance to an automatic runoff [5]. While the concept may seem straightforward, the Brennan Center for Justice suggests that ranking candidates in order of preference, as in RCV, may be more intuitive for voters [6].

Legal scholars, such as Edward B. Foley, have raised concerns that STAR voting might be on shaky constitutional grounds due to its scoring system [7]. By allowing voters to assign scores to multiple candidates, it could be argued that STAR voting violates the "one person, one vote" principle, which is a cornerstone of democratic elections. In fairness, this same concern can also be applied to Ranked Choice voting.

By contrast, in my view, in RCV, each voter ranks candidates in order of preference, and their vote is counted only once in each round of tabulation. The process of elimination and redistribution of votes in RCV upholds the "one person, one vote" principle, ensuring that each voter's preferences receive equal weight in the electoral process. It is important to note that the constitutionality of STAR voting has not been definitively settled by the courts. Until a legal challenge arises and is adjudicated, the question of STAR voting's constitutionality will remain open.

It is also worth noting that STAR voting has never been used in any meaningful election, whereas RCV has been successfully implemented in various jurisdictions, such as Australia, Ireland, and Scotland, as well as several US cities and states, leading to increased representation [8]. Oregon's HB 2004 is a preferable alternative, as it would establish RCV for statewide and federal offices, both for primary and general elections [9]. RCV gives voters more voice and power in the political process. Additionally, HB 2004 would establish a local option for

cities and counties to adopt RCV, paving the way for effective, multi-lingual, and culturally responsive learning tools for other jurisdictions [10].

I also don't see how STAR reduces vote splitting or strategic voting. In STAR voting, it is possible for voters to assign the same score to multiple candidates, potentially leading to strategic voting where voters give the maximum score to their favorite candidate and the minimum score to all others. Understanding the implications of strategic voting and how it affects the final outcome can be confusing for voters. In contrast, RCV's ranking system reduces the incentive for strategic voting, as voters simply express their genuine preferences in order. As RCV encourages voters to express their genuine preferences, the process is less susceptible to strategic voting manipulation [11]. This makes the voting experience simpler and more focused on the candidates' positions and qualifications rather than gaming the system.

We shouldn't gamble our statewide electoral system on an unproven, unused, and unknown voting system that even political science students struggle to grasp. Not to mention that I don't want to see our state burn tax dollars on a legal case that will likely go in front of SCOTUS that, considering its wonky approval system, will probably be seen as violating one person, one vote" principle, which is a cornerstone of democratic elections and a key component of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

I think that RCV offers a more reliable, equitable, and democratic solution compared to STAR voting. With its proven track record of increasing representation and fostering civil campaigns, RCV should be considered as a preferable alternative, such as in Oregon's HB 2004.

Sources:

[1] FairVote. (n.d.). Ranked Choice Voting. https://www.fairvote.org/rcv#why_rcv

[2] Ibid.

[3] Reilly, B. (2002). Social Choice in the South Seas: Electoral Innovation and the Borda Count in the Pacific Island Countries. *International Political Science Review*, 23(4), 355-372.

[4] Electoral Reform Society. (2017). The 2017 General Election: Volatile Voting, Random Results. <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/the-2017-general-election-volatile-voting-random-results/>

[5] Equal Vote Coalition. (n.d.). STAR Voting. <https://www.starvoting.us/>

[6] Brennan Center for Justice. (2018). Ranked Choice Voting: Minneapolis, Minnesota. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/ranked-choice-voting>

[7] Foley, E. B. (2020). The "One Person, One Vote" Case Against Ranked-Choice Voting. *Election Law Journal*, 19(3), 305-316. doi:10.1089/elj.2020.0647

[8] FairVote. (n.d.). Where is Ranked Choice Voting Used? https://www.fairvote.org/where_is_ranked_choice_voting_used

[9] Oregon State Legislature. (2023). HB 2004. <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Measures/Overview/HB2004>

[10] Ibid.

[11] Electoral Reform Society. (2017). The 2017 General Election: Volatile Voting, Random Results. <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/the-2017-general-election-volatile-voting-random-results/>