Response to testimony provided by RCV advocates at 3/16/21 Senate Rules Committee meeting

My name is Annie Kallen. I am a Portland resident and the chair of the Equal Vote Coalition. I submitted testimony previously, so this testimony is meant to respond to statements made by RCV advocates at the Senate Rules Committee meeting. I would like to thank Senators Dembrow and Golden for recognizing the urgent need for voting method reform in our state, and acting on it with this proposed legislation, although the voting method they have chosen, Ranked Choice Voting, has serious known flaws. I am in support of STAR voting, which is sometimes dubbed "RCV 2.0" as it is a modern update which more effectively delivers on the stated goals of RCV.

In his testimony at Tuesday's meeting, Senator Golden eloquently cited the main problem with our current voting method: Voting for the candidate you like the most can help elect the candidate you like the least. This is indeed a serious problem with choose-one-only voting, and it is also, counter-intuitively, arguably the biggest problem with Ranked Choice Voting. In fact, RCV is "non-monotonic," meaning that ranking a candidate higher can help that candidate to lose, and ranking a candidate lower can help that candidate to win. The non-intuitive behavior of Ranked Choice Voting is not often well understood by the general public, which is why I am in support of Representative Hudson's task force bill HB 3241, which would allow our state representatives to fully explore and understand the implications of choosing one voting method over another. Senator Golden also cited the need for accuracy and clarity in a voting method, areas in which STAR voting excels and RCV struggles. (See https://medium.com/election-science/star-voting-is-simpler-than-irv-84b8990986f2). I am very encouraged by Senator Golden's statement that he is considering amending bill SB 343 to include other preference voting methods, and I encourage him to add STAR.

Senator Rayfield mentioned that RCV is very easy to use, and he is absolutely right about that, as long as the voter believes that ranking candidates honestly will be in their best interest. However, due to the hidden vote-splitting in RCV, this is not always the case. Furthermore, the results from an RCV election are difficult to interpret. (See http://www.acgov.org/rov/rcv/results/226/rcvresults_8484.htm for a real-world example.) Typically, not all data from the election is published, and not all data from the ballots is used to determine the winner. Results must be tabulated all at once in a central location, further obscuring from view how the vote of a particular individual or region affected the result. In other words, RCV is easy to use, but difficult to understand. Most users of RCV are not aware of things such as non-monotonicity, exhausted ballots, or the need for strategic voting.

Representative Campos mentioned that we need a voting method that allows people to participate and feel represented, and one that they understand. I could not agree more, which is why I so passionately advocate for STAR voting while warning of the often misunderstood pitfalls of RCV. I hope that she will support HB 3241 to allow a deep dive into voting methods to determine which one best represents all voices in the most inclusive way possible. As she states, we want people to be able to support the candidate that they genuinely like the most,

which STAR does very well and RCV often fails to achieve. Representative Campos stated that STAR voting does not satisfy the majority criterion. She is correct about this, as no voting method, including RCV, can guaranty that a majority of voters prefer the winning candidate. Sometimes a majority does not exist. RCV creates the illusion of majority, often by exhausting (i.e. not counting) ballots that would have otherwise made a difference in the result. Also, when you limit the number of options to two in the final round, you will always have a majority in that round, but it does not necessarily mean you have a majority of people's actual preferences.

Several speakers stated that RCV eliminates the spoiler effect. This is demonstrably untrue from decades of research. (See https://www.starvoting.us/accuracy.)

A couple of speakers stated that STAR voting is bad for people of color. There is no evidence to support this. In some cases, people believe this because they have been told this is the case by bad faith actors who wish to cast doubt on a voting method that they have no valid arguments against. I encourage all interested citizens to take a close look at the science behind RCV (which is commonly called Instant Runoff Voting in the academic world) in comparison with better voting methods such as STAR voting and Approval voting. A more fair, more representative, more accurate, and more transparent voting method will be of the most benefit to the most traditionally underrepresented groups.