

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Geeroid, members of the committee, my name is Colin Cole and I am speaking today on behalf of More Equitable Democracy Action, where I work as Policy Director, in favor of SBs 791 and 343.

More Equitable Democracy Action is a racial justice organization that focuses on electoral systems. When properly implemented, ranked-choice voting has the demonstrable effect of increasing the voting power of communities of color and has resulted in more people of color both running for and winning election to offices where it has been used. I want to stress that this is not theory: **this happens.** We **know this.**

I would like to focus the bulk of my testimony today by responding to what committee members have heard about STAR voting.

First and foremost, STAR voting does not demonstrate any likelihood to provide communities of color an increased ability to win an equitable number of elections. In fact, STAR is likely to hurt communities of color. This, to put it lightly, is unacceptable: addressing institutional and systemic racism must be part of any effort to reform democracy. There is a reason a coalition of organizations led by and working in communities of color, like APANO, Latino Network, CCC, NAYA, and many more, are supporting SBs 791 and 343.

STAR, as a matter of fact, gives more voting power to voters who feel passionately about their top choices, or confident about voting, or who vote more strategically because of greater knowledge about how the system works. Representative Hudson spoke about how, in his view, “the problem was with ranking itself.” Respectfully, I would contend that for communities of color, “the problem is with scoring itself.”

Under STAR, two voters who feel EXACTLY the same way about the candidates, but use their scores differently for whatever reasons, have their votes count differently. It is not difficult to imagine scenarios in which a white voter has their vote count more than a person of colors. Caring more about a candidate should not result in a vote worth more. That is not how American elections should work.

The simple fact is, mathematics cited by STAR advocates that “prove” STAR is “objectively better” than RCV are simply *not* objective: those mathematic equations and formula were written by advocates of voting methods like STAR.

The “problems” with RCV that STAR advocates are concerned about, while technically possible, effectively *do not happen*. Ten million voters use ranked-choice voting today for elections from coast to coast, urban and rural, conservative and liberal, diverse and white. Where it is used, voters like it, voters use their rankings, and it is popular. Whatever “problems” RCV may potentially run into, the fact is that we know RCV is a better way to conduct elections than the way we do today.

The repeal of RCV in Burlington, Vermont did not demonstrate dissatisfaction with RCV as much as it demonstrated anti-democracy advocates taking advantage of a low-turnout election - demonstrated by the fact that Burlington just voted to reinstate RCV two weeks ago by a vote of 64%.

Meanwhile, STAR has no demonstrated ability to deliver on its promises beyond mathematical equations that were written with the explicit goal of promoting STAR.

Though its aspirations are laudable, there are too many unanswered questions about how people are likely to actually vote under real STAR elections because it has not been used in any real election. Meanwhile, ranked-choice voting's benefits are real, demonstrated, and proven.

STAR voting does not appear poised to advance racial justice in elected government and may actually impede it. It would also be remiss to use a system that has never been implemented in a real election. If you are interested in creating more equitable representation in government, please vote "yes" on SB 791 and 343.

Sincerely yours,

Colin Cole
Policy Director
More Equitable Democracy Action