

June 19, 2023

Chair Lieber, Vice Chair Knopp, and members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

My name is Mark Stephan. I am a professor of political science at Washington State University Vancouver, a resident of Portland, and a member of the board of governors for City Club of Portland. With all of that said, I am here representing only myself. I have a background in voting and electoral reform and have supported ranked choice voting in the past. I am writing to testify in strong support of HB 2004, which will establish ranked choice voting statewide and help ensure all Oregonians are represented in our democracy.

Though I agree with numerous others that ranked choice voting is an improvement to our elections, gives more power to voters to express their preferences, and is gaining wider popularity in our state, that's not what I want to address in my comments.

There is a misplaced concern among some that ranked choice voting will weaken the two party system. This simply isn't true. Partisanship will remain in Oregon – it will, in fact, become a bit stronger. Ranked choice voting will allow voters to choose their most preferred option and have backup options that they can live with. The dynamic effect of this system will undermine polarization without undermining partisanship. More moderate candidates will arise, but almost all them will work within the two major parties.

Our two-party system will adapt in critical ways – but they will far from disappear. The healthy connection of voters to parties will increase as the parties better match the preferences of voters. Everyone wins under this system. The two major parties will be stronger and the voters will get the candidates that best connect to their interests. Anyone that tells that the two parties will be undermined simply doesn't understand the dynamic of ranked choice voting.

As a political scientist and resident of Oregon, I am asking you to support HB 2004 and pass it out of committee. Let the full legislature have a chance to deliberate about this important electoral change.

Thank you,

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