

Statewide Ranked Choice Voting Testimony HB 2004 Hearing on June 20 at 1pm

RE: Support Statewide Ranked Choice Voting, HB 2004
Senate Committee on Rules

6/20/2023

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

My name is Brian Smith, and I am with Tribal Democracy Project. We are a recently formed organization created to address the systemic issues of voter disenfranchisement of Oregon's Tribal Communities. Our immediate mandates include implementation of non-partisan get out the vote operations, and promoting electoral reforms that we believe will better empower Native voters. We are part of a broad coalition of over 35 organizations, including culturally-specific organizations, labor unions, environmental groups, housing advocates, rural communities, youth-empowering organizations, and good government groups. 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.

In our current elections, candidates in crowded races are consistently winning with less than a majority. Over half of statewide and federal races with more than two candidates won with narrow support in Oregon's 2020 and 2022 primaries¹, leaving voters feeling like their vote didn't count and unable to fully express their preferences. Fear of splitting the vote creates barriers for candidates to run and leads to voter cynicism. It's clear that our elections aren't serving voters or candidates as best as they could.

We believe that ranked choice voting for federal and statewide offices gives Native voters more power to express their preferences and vote for candidates whose values they share. One of the barriers to voting for Tribal Communities is the lack of trust in federal and state governmental systems. This is seen often when there is high turnout for Tribal elections, and then much lower turnout in state and federal elections in the same community. Many Native voters view the current system is designed to force you to choose between the lesser of two evils, and if you vote for the candidate that best reflects your values, you're throwing away your vote and/or acting as a spoiler. Ranked choice voting empowers people to vote their values and creates more trust in our democratic systems. Also, we believe candidates for public office will be more inclined to reach out to ALL voters, creating a better dialogue and increasing the likelihood Native voters feel they are being engaged. This leads to better trust in our democracy.

¹ Oregon Secretary of State, [State of Oregon Elections: Election History](#)

Another feature of HB 2004 worth noting is the provision for proportional ranked choice voting in local elections. There is a very flawed portrayal and narrative that excludes communities of color as vibrant and present communities in rural Oregon. The reality is that rural Oregon is home to many Native people, Latinx people, and other communities of color. Native and Latinx communities are under-represented on local boards, commissions, and city councils, largely due to voter disenfranchisement, but also to the current system. Equitable representation in these local offices will help to enfranchise voters of color and help to build more trust in our system.

Thank you,

Brian Smith (He/Him)
Co-Director
Tribal Democracy Project