



Date: June 20th, 2023
To: Senate Committee on Rules
From: Crystalyn Black, Policy Analyst for the Urban League of Portland
Re: Support for Ranked Choice Voting, HB 2004-A

Chair Lieber, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2004-A. My name is Crystalyn Black, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Urban League of Portland. The Urban League of Portland is one of Oregon's oldest civil rights and social service organizations, empowering African Americans and others to achieve equality in education, employment, health, economic security, and quality of life across Oregon and SW Washington.

In its most recent State of Black America publication, "Under Siege: The Plot to Destroy Democracy," the National Urban League opens the report with setting the context of where democracy is under siege in the United States. In 1976, the first report "captured the plight of a people who had been victims of systemic racism since arriving on the shores of this nation. More than a century after enslaved people were freed at the end of the civil war, the political leadership in this country had failed to help Black Americans secure equal rights entitled to all Americans. Politicians, including the President, had also failed to adequately capture and address the systemic barriers to equitable employment, health, housing, education, social justice, civic participation, and economic opportunity. Out of this, the State of Black America was born."¹ We are again raising the alarm about the outlook for Black and Brown people. Political forces have launched an all-out assault on voting rights that disproportionately affects the communities that we serve. State legislatures are restricting voting access in districts with large populations of African Americans and other people of color.

To ensure that our democracy here in Oregon continues to thrive and is strengthened, we not only have to improve and broaden access but make the process one that is fair and reflective of the choices our communities want to make, not the ones they are forced to. Our current system pushes voters to vote strategically and cynically, often forcing them to select the candidate most likely to win, not the candidate they truly want to represent them or who shares their values. Fear of "vote splitting" impacts both voters casting their ballot and the pool of qualified candidates who chose to run. Candidates who share the viewpoints and represent the communities they would like to serve are often discouraged from running due to silent primaries and crowded ballots. Now more than ever we need issue-driven platforms and candidates who reflect and advocate for their community's needs.

¹ National Urban League, [Under Siege the Plot to Destroy Democracy](#), 2022, pg.3.



Ranked Choice Voting leads to better representation for women and people of color. In a study conducted by Represent Women that examined local city councils, with Ranked Choice Voting elections women won 43% of seats, compared to the top 100 cities not using Ranked Choice Voting in which women only won 33% of seats; in a study conducted by the National Civic League that analyzed elections in the Bay Area, CA, people of color won 38% of seats before Ranked Choice Voting, and increased to 62% after using Ranked Choice Voting.

More representative elected bodies mean that voters' priorities will be championed by candidates that reflect their communities. Ranked choice voting enables a voter's one vote to hold significance because their vote is more likely to dynamically represent their political stance. With more agency to express their preferences, voters can vote for candidates whose values they share, and their vote becomes more meaningful. Ranked choice voting leads to increased voter satisfaction and provides Oregonians with a simple, proven solution that will lead to more inclusive and equitable elections for all communities. A fair election involves candidates competing for all votes. When voters are able to rank candidates, candidates are incentivized to expand their engagement across racial, ethnic, gender, and ideological spectrums to continue competing for votes. With counties and cities in our state already adopting ranked choice voting, HB 2004-A helps ensure that local jurisdictions have the resources and tools they need for multilingual and accessible voter education. As an organization deeply rooted in empowering Black communities through our civic engagement and advocacy work, we urge you to support House Bill 2004-A.

Respectfully,

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