



RE: Oregon Wild support for HB 2004, statewide ranked choice voting Senate Committee on Rules

June 20, 2023

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

My name is Sean Stevens and I am the executive director at Oregon Wild. We are a statewide organization nearing our 50th anniversary working to protect and restore Oregon's wildlands, wildlife, and waters as an enduring legacy for future generations. The inner workings of our democracy influence our ability to protect our natural wonders. A democracy influenced by severe partisanship, extremism, and excessive money has failed to represent the will of Oregonians when it comes to safeguarding wildlands and wildlife - hugely popular initiatives across the political spectrum.

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 that are all pushing for key changes to how our elections function. 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 primaries, 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.

This same fear of vote splitting has led to most voters adopting a strategy of voting for the "lesser of two evils" rather than getting the chance to vote for candidates who best reflect their values. Ranked choice voting will allow Oregonians to choose the candidates they like best, without inadvertently helping the candidate they like least.

Ranked choice voting also allows for candidates to hold more nuanced positions on a variety of

issues. The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center polling shows that 77% of Oregonians say protection of the environment should be given priority over economic growth.¹ Yet there is a stark partisan divide in the voting records of elected officials. With ranked choice voting, candidates are less beholden to the extremes of the political spectrum and better able to reflect the values of the communities they serve.

Voters in several jurisdictions in Oregon and across the country are already voting using the ranked choice voting system. And they are reporting a preference for ranked choice voting over our current system.

Ranked choice voting is a proven solution and Oregon's next step as a leader in election reform. As a representative of Oregon Wild, we ask that you please support HB 2004 and pass it out of committee.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SS' with a flourish.

Sean Stevens
(he/him)
Executive Director
Oregon Wild

¹ Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, Aug 2021, <https://oregonvbc.org/climate-change/>