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MARCH 14, 2023

RE: SUPPORT STATEWIDE RANKED CHOICE VOTING, HB 2004
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES

Chair Fahey, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson, Vice Chair Kropf, and members of the House Committee on Rules,

North Star Civic Foundation is a private foundation that conducts research and convening in the areas of open democracy and shared prosperity — because we believe that these are the building blocks for a hopeful future. I am writing to testify in strong support of HB 2004, which will allow ranked choice voting statewide and help ensure all Oregonians are represented in our democracy.

In all our work on democracy, we aim for three outcomes:

1. **Increasing the power of everyday people** in community decision making.
2. **Increasing voter participation and voter confidence**, particularly among low income people, youth, and communities of color that have been historically excluded from full voter participation.
3. **Fostering a spirit of common purpose** and common destiny in an increasingly polarized electorate.

We support Ranked Choice Voting because it has measurably advanced all three of these goals in elections in the US and in other similar democracies worldwide. We provide detailed research notes below and are available for consultation if needed.

Ranked choice voting is a proven solution and is Oregon's next logical step as a national leader in fully participatory democracy. I thank you for considering this historic vote and ask that you please support HB 2004 and pass it out of committee.



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RESEARCH NOTES:

1. Ranked Choice Voting Increases the power of everyday people in community decision making.

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) elections deliver outcomes that better reflect the full range of voter preferences, which increases the voice and power of everyday people in community decisions. RCV allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference. This means that voters can confidently vote for candidates who match up with their values and perspectives, without fear “splitting the vote” and contributing to an election in which someone they would oppose wins by a small plurality.

Here’s how it works: In ranked choice elections, voters rank candidates in order of preference. If no candidate is the top preference for more than half of voters, an instant runoff process starts. The candidate who earned the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated. For voters who selected that candidate, their votes are not wasted. Instead, they are distributed to the candidates listed as their second preference. The process continues until one candidate has gained majority support.

Working in this way, the system guarantees that candidates in crowded races are elected with the support of most voters, instead of having races decided by a slim plurality. When voters rank candidates, their vote becomes more meaningful, ultimately leading to an outcome they are more satisfied with.

According to FairVote, elections in the United States are most often determined by one factor: Partisanship. Partisanship dwarfs other considerations, including local issues and candidate strength. The result is a system in which candidates are rewarded for adopting hyper-partisan and polarizing positions. Ranked Choice Voting increases the power of everyday people to rank a range of candidate with different views, and this also strengthens the political parties themselves by giving them more accurate information about true voter preferences than the current “first past the post” election system can provide. This means that voter preferences are heard both in elections and by party organizations – a win for democracy.

2. Ranked Choice Voting Increases voter participation and voter confidence.

In cities and states where ranked choice voting is used, voters continuously report that ranked choice voting is easy to use and understand. Four out of five voters defined the new voting system as ‘simple’¹ in Alaska’s 2022 General Election and, in Maine, 78% of voters understood ranked choice voting after the 2018 election.² In exit polls across multiple jurisdictions that use ranked choice voting, on average, 73% of voters prefer it to our current system.³

1 Alaskans for Better Elections. (2022). Polling Shows Alaskan Voters Received Clear Instructions on the System, Found Ranking to be “Simple,” and saw more Competitive Races. ([link](#))

2 FairVote. *Exit Surveys: Voters Evaluate Ranked Choice Voting After First Use.* ([link](#))

3 FairVote. *Exit Surveys: Voters Evaluate Ranked Choice Voting After First Use.* ([link](#))

A wide range of studies have sought to understand the impacts of Ranked Choice Voting on voter turnout. Many find that voters participate at higher levels in RCV electoral systems. Within this literature, different studies point to different measurable reasons for increased turnout, discussed below.

- Several studies indicate that switching to ranked choice voting increases voter participation in local elections from 9.6% to as much as 270% ([Fairvote, n.d.](#)⁴; [McGinn, 2020](#)⁵; [Jerdonek, 2006](#)⁶; [Robb, 2011](#)⁷).
- One study demonstrates that “RCV helps reduce the substantial drop in voter participation that commonly occurs between primary and runoff elections” ([Kimball & Anthony, 2016](#)⁸).
- Another study finds that RCV has a positive effect on youth participation in elections, but no significant effect for older populations. The data implies that this is because young people are more likely to be contacted by candidates and campaigns under RCV systems than young people in plurality systems ([Juelich & Coll, 2021](#)⁹).

3. Ranked Choice Voting fosters a spirit of common purpose and common destiny in an increasingly polarized electorate.

Research and survey data show that RCV has the potential to result in more positive campaigns. Candidates are more prone to collaborate in RCV systems than in first-past-the-post systems and less likely to engage in negative campaigning (Kropf, 2021¹⁰; Donovan et. al, 2016¹¹; Reilly, 2002¹²; John & Douglas, 2017¹³; Eberhard, 2015¹⁴).

⁴ Fairvote. (n.d.). *Ranked choice voting and increased turnout*. ([link](#))

⁵ McGinn, E. (2020). *Rating Rankings: Effect of Instant Run-off Voting on participation and civility*. Working Paper. ([link](#))

⁶ Jerdonek, C. (2006). *Ranked Choice Voting and Voter Turnout in San Francisco’s 2005 Election*. Working Paper. ([link](#))

⁷ Robb, D.M. (2011). *The Effect of Instant Runoff Voting on Democracy*. Doctoral dissertation. ([link](#))

⁸ Kimbal, D. C. & Anthony, J. (2016). *Voter Participation with Ranked Choice Voting in the United States*. Working Paper. ([link](#))

⁹ Juelich, C.L., & Coll, J.A. (2021). Ranked Choice Voting and Youth Voter Turnout: The Roles of Campaign Civility and Candidate Contact. *Politics and Governance*, 9, 319-331. ([link](#))

¹⁰ Kropf, M. (2021). Using Campaign Communications to Analyze Civility in Ranked Choice Voting Elections. *Politics and Governance*, 9(2), 280–292. ([link](#))

¹¹ Donovan, T., Tolbert, C., Gracey, K. (2016). Campaign civility under preferential and plurality voting. *Electoral Studies*, 42, 157-163. ([link](#))

¹² Reilly, B. (2002). Electoral Systems for Divided Societies. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2), 156-170. ([link](#))

¹³ John, S. & Douglas, A. (2017). Candidate Civility and Voter Engagement in Seven Cities with Ranked Choice Voting. *National Civic Review*. 106(1) 25-29. ([link](#))

¹⁴ Eberhard, K. (2015, June 9). *Hate Negative Campaigns?* Sightline Institute. ([link](#))

The authors of one study on Ranked Choice Voting (using another common term for RCV - preferential voting) report that their “surveys of voters indicate that people in cities using preferential voting were significantly more satisfied with the conduct of local campaigns than people in similar cities with plurality elections. People in cities with preferential voting were also less likely to view campaigns as negative, and less likely to respond that candidates were frequently criticizing each other” ([Donovan et. al, 2016](#)¹⁵).

Another study uses campaign communications data to study and compare campaign civility in RCV and plurality cities. The author analyzes newspaper articles for campaign tone and finds that articles from RCV cities “have significantly more positive than negative words” ([Kropf, 2021](#)¹⁶).

Ranked choice voting helps ensure that candidates have broad support, by giving voters the option to rank candidates in both the primary and general elections. Additionally, because candidates are encouraged to seek not only first-choice votes, but second- and third- choice votes as well, they are incentivized to engage with voters across racial, ethnic, gender, and ideological spectrums.

¹⁵ Donovan, T., Tolbert, C., Gracey, K. (2016). Campaign civility under preferential and plurality voting. *Electoral Studies*, 42, 157-163. ([link](#))

¹⁶ Kropf, M. (2021). Using Campaign Communications to Analyze Civility in Ranked Choice Voting Elections. *Politics and Governance*, 9(2), 280–292. ([link](#))