



Service Employees International Union Local 503

72,000 public services workers, care providers, and non-profit employees in Oregon.

To: House Committee on Rules
On: March 16th, 2023
Re: House Bill 2004

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

My name is David Ramos, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of SEIU Locals 503 and 49 – who represent more than 85,000 workers in the state of Oregon from public sector employees to care providers, janitors, healthcare workers, nonprofit workers, and more. Our organization is part of a larger coalition that is composed of a vast array of partners such as culturally-specific organizations, environmental groups, housing advocates, rural communities, youth-empowering organizations, and good government groups. I am here today to testify in strong support of HB 2004, which will establish Ranked Choice Voting statewide and help ensure that 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. It's clear that our elections aren't serving voters or candidates as best as they could.

With more than 60 jurisdictions using or recently adopting ranked choice voting, including four in our own state, this new process for electing leaders is a proven solution. Benton County and Corvallis voters have successfully used ranked-choice voting for their local elections, and both Portland and Multnomah County voters overwhelmingly approved the adoption of ranked-choice voting this past November. It is a part of why SEIU Local 503 has started to adopt ranked-choice voting for its internal elections – because there is data indicating that voters feel more represented by and are more satisfied with election outcomes when they are determined using ranked-choice voting.

With local jurisdictions already having turned to ranked-choice voting, it is crucial that we provide county clerks with the support and tools they need to implement this system effectively. Creating a statewide voting infrastructure for ranked choice voting will give our communities the resources they need to be successful while maintaining election integrity. Thanks to its existing use, voter education resources, and strategies have already been developed and proven – so we already have a blueprint for the outreach and community education efforts we'll need to engage in to empower our state's voters to fully utilize this new system.

As a labor union, the very core of our work is to uplift and empower working Oregonians. A significant part of this is to participate in their elections because we know that under a democratic system, our vote is our voice and our power – a vehicle of change we all possess. It is critical that working Oregonians like our members have elected officials in office who share their values.

Ranked Choice Voting leads to more reflective outcomes and better representation – a win-win for voters and candidates alike. By allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference,

PO Box 12159, Salem, OR 97309-0159 | seiu503.org | 1-844-503-SEIU (7348)

candidates are able to run without fear of splitting the vote and voters are given more meaningful choices. This will ensure greater satisfaction among voters with our democracy – something that is greatly needed in a time of high dissatisfaction with our government and immense doubt among communities about the true power of voting.

Oregon has always been on the cutting edge of election reform. Something that has always made me and our members proud to be an Oregonian. I imagine many of you share that sentiment. Ranked choice voting is a proven solution and Oregon's next step to continue being a leader in this space. On behalf of our 85,000 members, I *urge* you all to please support HB 2004 and pass it out of committee.

Thank you,

David Ramos
Policy & Political Strategist
SEIU Local 503, OPEU