TESTIMONY OF HONORABLE J. KENNETH BLACKWELL
CHAIR OF THE CENTER FOR ELECTION INTEGRITY AT THE AMERICA FIRST POLICY INSTITUE AND FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE STATE OF OHIO (1999-2007)

Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member Demora and members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 137 sponsored Senator Gavarone and Senator Demora. This bill would ban ranked choice voting on the state and local level and would withhold funding for any municipality or chartered county that uses RCV.

First let me congratulate you on this proposed legislation. It fits perfectly with the reputation Ohio has across the country as a leader in election integrity. Your commitment to provide fair, transparent elections is an example for other states.

Now as it relates to Ranked Choice Voting, let me say that the Center for Election Integrity at the America First Policy Institute recognizes that Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is an overly complicated, confusing system of voting that often prevents the candidate who gets the most votes from being declared the winner.
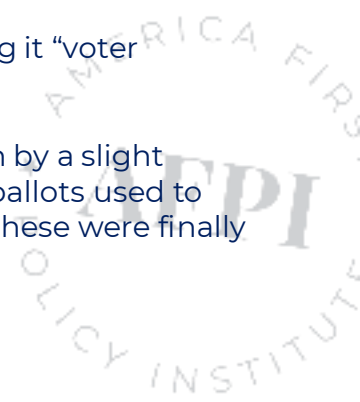
All we need to do is look at examples across the country of failure by RCV to bring transparent and fair elections for the voters.

In Alaska, where Ranked Choice Voting was recently implemented, the system has shown itself to be confusing and chaotic, and the state's citizens are taking notice. Even supporters of RCV like Alaskan pollster Ivan Moore acknowledge that the voting system is in trouble. A recent survey that he conducted shows that a majority of Alaska voters would vote to repeal Ranked Choice Voting if given a chance.

The Alaska people's distrust in Ranked Choice Voting is unsurprising given that in the most recent statewide election, more than 11,000 people did not have their votes counted in the final tallies. This occurred because 11,000 ballots did not rank a candidate as their second preference. As a result of the way RCV is conducted, when election officials started the second round of counting and reallocating votes to other candidates, those 11,000 ballots were completely discarded. 11,000 voters were disenfranchised because of the way RCV works.

In New York City the NAACP also strongly opposed Ranked Choice Voting, calling it "voter suppression".

This followed the 2021 New York City mayoral race, which Mayor Eric Adams won by a slight margin. 135,000 ballots were originally erroneously counted, as they were "test" ballots used to prepare the voting machines and work out any issues in the RCV system. Once these were finally

discarded, vote tallies became much closer, and then-candidate Adams filed a lawsuit to be able to have a judge review the ballots, as there was so little trust in the system.

In Oakland California, in a Ranked Choice Voting system that has been in place for over a decade, the wrong person was elected and sworn into office for the School Board. It took months of confusion and recounting until the correct winner was established.

In a mayor' race in 2022, also in Oakland, when the vote went to a recount, 3,000 votes were 'overvotes' and discarded, meaning that the voter marked the same candidate multiple times in an election. That election was decided by 677 votes.

If these real-world examples are not enough proof why this legislation to ban Ranked Choice Voting or Instant Run-off voting should be passed, there are several studies from very liberal institutions that I would refer you to.

A 2021 Massachusetts Institute of Technology study on RCV in Maine revealed that it "produced significantly lower levels of voter confidence, voter satisfaction, and ease of use. It also increased the perception that the voting process was slanted against the respondent's party. Similarly, [the study] found that it increased the amount of time it took to vote by nearly 12 seconds per candidate than voting using a plurality ballot". The study also found that negative campaign ad spending increased after implementation of RCV, in contrast to the claim that it increases civility in campaigning.

An April 2023 study from the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Policy at the University of Minnesota, stated, "We have carefully reviewed the track record of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) and it fails to support four of the advocates' promises for improvements over today's system.

The four promises that RCV fails at, according to the HHH School of Public Policy are: Reduce today's polarization of the political parties; Increase the diversity of elected government officials; Increased voter turnout and engagement of voters of color; Decreased negative campaigning.

RCV is a failure for the voters and for fairness. What's more, Ranked Choice Voting also creates chaos by piling more work on the already-overloaded election workers.

Recently, our country has seen countless stories about election worker shortages, election workers laboring overnight to count ballots, and even election workers who were ordered to stop counting on election day and start the next day again. Requiring these same workers to categorize, discard, evaluate, and recount every election outcome multiple times until a winner can be declared is a recipe for disaster.

The voters of Ohio would be well-served by this proposed law that would once and for all ban Ranked Choice Voting and Instant Run-Off Elections in our state. For voters, for election workers, for transparency and integrity in elections, I urge this Committee to support SB 137 and pass this legislation into law.

Thank you.