

February 19, 2024

General Government Committee of the Ohio Senate
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the General Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 137. My name is Ralph Vatner, I am physician-scientist and a resident of Cincinnati, District 7. I am writing in strong opposition to the passage of Senate Bill 137.

I am an ardent supporter of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) as a relatively simple means for improving our current voting system and further empowering all voters, and I was shocked to hear there was a bill being considered in the Ohio Senate that would effectively ban RCV. Ranked Choice Voting is one of the most straightforward methods for improving representation in our government, giving each citizen the freedom to vote for their true choice of candidates without fear that such a vote for a less popular candidate may detract from support of a more “electable” candidate and ultimately facilitate election of a candidate they least support. Ever since my first experience voting as an 18 year-old college student, I have frequently felt the need to choose between the best candidate for elected office and the least bad candidate who I felt had enough support to win in the election. This is by no means an isolated opinion. In the 2020 primary election I canvased in support of a candidate I believed was best suited to serve my community and all Ohioans. Meeting voters face-to-face, I frequently heard that they also supported this candidate, but they were unlikely to vote for them due to concerns of “electability”. This concern is shared by voters of all parties and is always a part of the discussion and news coverage in our elections. The result of our current system of voting is the elevation of candidates based on concerns and predictions of how other people will vote instead of who they truly support as the best candidates for elected office. RCV is a simple solution to this problem, allowing voters to select the candidates they truly support without fear that their vote will not count if their first choice candidate does not receive enough votes to win the election.

We Ohioans can look to other states that have adopted Ranked Choice Voting to address concerns that have been raised as justification for a ban on this adjustment to our system of voting. One concern I have heard is that RCV is too complicated or confusing for voters; however, in the 2020 Maine elections 90% of voters reported their first experience with RCV as “excellent”. In their first RCV elections, 85% of Alaska voters reported that RCV was “simple” and 81% of Utah voters said RCV was “easy”. I am a firm believer in the intelligence of our citizens and their ability to learn and adopt updates to our elections such as RCV. And for the few voters who prefer our current system and only want to vote for one candidate can do that in elections utilizing RCV. Another concern I have heard is that RCV is somehow unconstitutional; however, the constitutionality of RCV has been upheld by the courts in cases challenging this system in Maine and in municipalities such as San Francisco, Minneapolis, Cambridge (Massachusetts), and Ann Arbor (Michigan). Some have also expressed concerns over the potential cost of implementing RCV, but the actual cost has been minimal in other states that have adopted RCV. For example, the first use of RCV in Maine only cost a total of \$89,000, less than \$0.08 per voter, and in Ohio, 80% of voting districts already have the capability to implement RCV in their elections.

Ultimately, this is a question of the freedom and autonomy of the citizens of Ohio. Voters should be free to determine the best process for electing their public officials, and SB 137 interferes with this

foundational right of our democratic system of government. Although I believe Ranked Choice Voting would be an improvement to our current system of elections, the decision whether or not to adopt RCV should be in the hands of voters. If enacted, SB 137 would strip voters of their freedom to chose.

I ask you to consider my testimony and support the freedom and autonomy of Ohioans by voting NO on this harmful bill.

Sincerely,



Ralph E. Vatner, MD, PhD
Cincinnati, Ohio