



Ohio Environmental Council [Action Fund]

February 21, 2024

Opponent Testimony - SB 137 Senate General Government Committee

Chairman Rulli, Vice-Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony today. My name is Franklin Davis. I am the Director of Climate and Democracy Organizing for the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. The OEC Action Fund is dedicated to ensuring clean air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. Ohioans who care about the environment know all too well the need for fair elections to ensure the voices of the people are heard. Our membership consists of people that span the entire state, from the Ohio River to Lake Erie, and they care passionately about the future of Ohio both for its environment and its future residents. To achieve these goals, every community, no matter their defining characteristics, must see themselves represented when they go to vote.

We lend our testimony today opposing Senate Bill (SB) 137. Simply put, we see no reason to restrict local governments from deciding how to run their elections. If a municipality wishes to utilize Ranked Choice Voting for their local elections, it should be permitted to do so.

Local communities make a variety of decisions regarding how they structure their city councils, mayor races, and other elected offices, basing those decisions on the needs and wants of their constituents. Take for example, the Main Street Corridor right here in Central Ohio. Columbus' City Council is made up of 9 district representatives. However, the entire city votes on the representatives for each district. Bexley has a 7 member, at-large council. Whitehall has a city council of 8 members: 4 ward members, 3 at large, and a council president. Ward members are selected only by residents of that ward. In a 9 mile stretch of Central Ohio road, there are 4 distinct municipal governments with unique makeups (to say nothing of townships). These at large seats are chosen by a "Choose up to 3 candidates" selection model.

Cuyahoga County also has a more complex county government, with an executive, while other counties have chosen to utilize different representative systems with county commissioners.

All around, such diversity makes Ohio's communities truly special. If a community in Ohio wants to explore an alternative voting system like Ranked Choice Voting, that community would simply be leaning into the power of such diversity with their democracy processes.

The Ohio Legislative Service Commission analysis of the bill states that it "allows a county or municipal corporation to use its home rule powers under the Ohio Constitution to adopt a Ranked Choice Voting system, but financially penalizes a local government that does so." It also "makes a county or municipal corporation that approves the use of Ranked Choice Voting via a resolution or ordinance ineligible to receive distributions from the Local Government Fund until it rescinds the resolution or ordinance."



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Local governments should not be penalized for choosing to utilize an alternative election system like Ranked Choice Voting, a system utilized successfully in a variety of communities across the country. While to our knowledge, no communities in Ohio have adopted Ranked Choice Voting, if a community were to consider it for their own elections, they shouldn't have financial penalties hanging over their head when making that decision.

Please, do not restrict the ability of Ohioans to choose the best leaders for their communities by making them choose between a voting method that might be better for their community and the financial security of those same communities.

It is my sincere hope that the constitutional values that I hold dear, such as home rule and the will of the people being reflected, will be valued by our legislature and that this bill and others like it will be rejected.

Chairman Rulli, members of the committee thank you again for the chance to provide testimony on SB 137 today. I'm happy to answer any questions if you have them.

Respectfully submitted,

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