

Chair, Vice Chair & Ranking Member of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Harriet Applegate and I am opposed to SB 137.

Ranked Choice Voting [RCV] is an elegant & precise barometer of voter opinion. According to Charlie Taft of Cincinnati, unbeknownst to them at the time, Proportional Representation [as it was then called] was the “*Crown Jewel of the Progressive Era Reforms*” in the 1920’s. Its natural home is the state of Ohio where it was used in five cities [for the first time nationally in Ashtabula] and in one, Cincinnati, stood the test of time for 30 years before it was thrown out on the fifth try in a race-baiting campaign in 1955. During this time, Cincinnati was dubbed ‘Best Governed City in the Nation’ for a number of years. Now referred to as Ranked Choice Voting, it is enjoying a resurgence all over the nation. 10 million voters in 24 cities & counties used RCV in 70 elections in 2023.

My own city of Cleveland was the home of John Carroll University professor Kathleen Barber who wrote the preeminent book on the subject, Proportional Representation and Election Reform in Ohio, published by the OSU Press in 1995. In short, contrary to claims of the opposition, it would not be exaggerating to say that *RCV is to Ohio as apple pie is to America*. Indeed, it is the proponents who are the out-of-state special interests.

Since 1923, the right of charter cities to use RCV to elect their legislative bodies has been enshrined in our Constitution. Home Rule is sacred to Ohio charter cities and should be preserved at all costs. Additionally, RCV has been held up in the courts as meeting the criteria of ‘One Man One Vote.’

While the counting of votes can be challenging for Boards of Election, RCV is user friendly for the voter: all that is necessary is to rank your choices. In the 2023 election cycle, 95% of voters in NYC said it was simple & 77% want to keep using it; 92% of voters in Minneapolis, 85% in Atlanta, and 86% in Boulder said it was easy to complete their ballot.

Ranked Choice voting increases voter satisfaction because over 90% get one of their top choices elected and systemically fosters cooperation and civility in two ways: cooperation among candidates increases their chances of winning and these cooperative relationships carry over into the legislative body, thereby mitigating competitiveness, hostility and distrust.

It is supported by – because it helps – conservatives, moderates AND progressives. It guarantees majority rule but also allows significant & organized minorities to gain seats otherwise impossible for them to win. As I’m sure you have been told more than once, candidates who win are supported by a majority of the voters, giving them extra heft.

Prominent conservatives who support RCV include Kevin Kosar of the American Enterprise Institute, Matt Germer and Jonathan Bydlak of the R Street Institute & Walter Olson of the CATO Institute. Two former GOP state chairs support it as well as former Sen Rob Portman. It is opposed primarily by unreasonable extremists who want to hijack primaries and put people in power whose opinions are not shared by the majority of their constituents.

In sum, too many voters feel they are left out of the political process and most voters in Ohio and across our nation feel our political system has grown rancorous and mean-spirited, leading directly to widespread alienation and despair and resulting in large swaths of disengagement from politics & culture. There is growing pressure to move toward a more comprehensive and fair way to elect our public officials. RCV accomplishes this and it is the best way to achieve *legislatures* that are cooperative and productive and an *electorate* that is engaged.