



Opposition Testimony to Senate Bill 137
Senate General Government Committee
Nazek Hapasha, League of Women Voters of Ohio
April 24, 2024

Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Demora, esteemed members of the committee, and hard working legislative staff:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in opposition to SB 137. As the Policy Affairs Manager of the League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO), I am honored to advocate for all Ohio voters as well as our dues-paying members, who live in every Senate District of this state.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League has never endorsed political candidates or political parties and we never will. Our mission and work is rooted in empowering every Ohioan, regardless of who they are and what they believe in, to take an active role in shaping the decisions that impact their everyday lives. We have been able to continue this mission for more than 100 years now because giving people the tools and information they need to vote, and removing barriers to the ballot, is the lifeblood of a functioning democracy.

The League stands in opposition to Senate bill 137 because it essentially seeks to remove a tool from Ohio's democracy toolbox and punish local governments for seeking a way to allow Ohioans to more fully engage in local elections. Senate Bill 137 is government overreach and violates Ohio's long standing tradition of home rule. Local governments should be able to continue to make decisions based on local needs and preferences. SB 137 would limit voter choices and financially punish communities for choosing an electoral system that requires candidates to have more than 50% of the votes to win a race.

Ranked choice voting (RCV) is promising and deserves a chance to succeed. Among the many potential benefits of RCV is that it allows people to mark preferences for multiple candidates, rather than just choosing one, which allows for a fuller expression of voter preferences. Ranked choice voting forces candidates to appeal to a broader swath of voters rather than a narrow base - something Ohio is entirely in need of. Research shows that candidates particularly conduct more voter outreach to demographics that vote in lower numbers like young people,

and that RCV increases voter turnout for those populations.¹ RCV also promotes bipartisanship - again, something that is much desired by all Ohioans in a time of unprecedented political divide.²

The most important feature of a ranked choice voting system is that it reveals the candidate with the most support across the entire electorate. The League supports legislation that assures that the candidate preferred by a majority of voters wins the election, and supports the right of local governments and municipalities, if supported by voters, to choose RCV for their own elections.

Much has been said about ranked choice voting being too complicated. While RCV may be more complicated than just selecting one candidate, it certainly is not a barrier to voting, and I would argue not complicated at all. If I may simplify this, I have three children. My youngest is three. Even he does not like for his choices to be taken away from him. If he is allowed to have a treat, he doesn't want you to pick out the treat for him. He wants to go to the pantry and pick out the treat for himself. And if I were to ask him, which treat is your favorite, which is your second favorite, and which is your third favorite - I promise you he would have no trouble in expressing and ranking his preferences. It undermines and insults the electorate to tell them a choice has been taken away from them because it's too complicated for them to understand.

Is RCV perfect and the solution to all our problems? Certainly not, education and funding are real concerns that need to be considered in the adoption of any system that makes such fundamental changes to how we vote. But it has the potential to provide solutions to real problems that we face in Ohio and local governments should not be punished for exercising their right to choose RCV for their own local races.

I am happy to answer any questions. Please feel free to contact me to discuss further at nhapasha@lwvohio.org or 614-469-1505. Thank you.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio was formed in May 1920 out of Ohio's woman suffrage movement. The League is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League has over 4000 members and 34 local Leagues across the Buckeye State.

¹ <https://blogs.uofi.uis.edu/view/8598/1650413886>

² *Does Ranked Choice Voting Promote Legislative Bipartisanship? Using Maine as a Policy Laboratory*
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4538418