



Ohio Senate

Senate Building
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
(614) 466-8060
Gavarone@ohiosenate.gov

Committees

General Government - Vice Chair
Local Government - Vice Chair
JCARR - Co-Chair
Judiciary
Public Utilities
Rules and Reference
Small Business and Economic Opportunity

Senator Theresa Gavarone

Senate Majority Floor Leader
2nd District

Chair Ray, and members of the House General Government Committee, thank you for the chance to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 63, legislation that would effectively ban the use of ranked choice voting, also known as instant runoff voting, in Ohio.

Ranked choice voting is a voting method that continuously eliminates candidates in a series of rounds until one candidate wins a majority, 50% +1 vote. Under this election method, voters rank candidates in order of their personal preference instead of choosing just one.

While ranked choice voting is not currently used in Ohio, it was employed by several cities, including Cincinnati, Cleveland and Toledo, in the 1900s before its citizens, fed up with the process, demanded the experiment to end. Unfortunately, some in our state are ignoring history by plowing forward with an idea that would bring ranked choice voting to Ohio.

In a time when people from both parties have questioned the integrity of our elections, it seems crazy to me that anyone would consider an election method that, in its most basic form, distorts election outcomes. Quite frankly, should ranked choice be implemented across Ohio, it would undo more than two centuries of voters having the ability to cast their vote with one vote and once voice.

During my time in the General Assembly, I have worked hard to pass legislation that gives Ohioans earlier access to election results in order to improve election integrity and voter confidence. Ranked choice voting flies in the face of that common sense work by causing greater uncertainty and delayed election results that can take days or weeks to settle.

On top of causing delays in Ohioans receiving election results, ranked choice voting has been proven to decrease voter turnout, create confusion because of complex election procedures and tabulation processes, and silence the voices of voters. How confusing is ranked choice voting? Data shows that in a typical ranked choice race, nearly 1 in 20 (4.8%) voters improperly mark their ballot in at least one way. Ohio is a national leader in the way we run our elections, and the surest way to undermine that would be to implement ranked choice voting.

Don't take my word for it. In the states and cities that have implemented ranked choice voting there have been countless complaints. But this isn't even a partisan issue. Neither Democrats nor Republicans are vociferous fans of ranked choice voting. For example, voters in the town of Arlington, Virginia complained about the confusing tabulation process in a local election, and the majority of electors surveyed want to remove the system for the general electionⁱ. Further, in a race for school board in a California county, ranked choice voting was blamed as the reason for a loser of the race being declared and certified the winnerⁱⁱ. Finally, the Governor of California vetoed legislation in 2019 to employ ranked choice voting across the state.ⁱⁱⁱ Many other instances of ranked choice voting flaws and bipartisan criticisms are just a click away on a search engine.

Moreover, in the 2024 election, five states had ballot measures that would have enacted ranked choice voting, voters in all five states rejected these measures. These states were Oregon, Montana, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, and Nevada.^{iv}

If enacted, Senate Bill 63 would prohibit ranked choice voting in all elections in Ohio except, as the Ohio Supreme Court decided in 1923, for those conducted in municipalities or chartered counties. The bill would deem any municipality or chartered county ineligible to receive Local Government Fund distributions if they choose to implement ranked choice voting. Past Ohio Supreme Court precedent ensures that this legislation in no way violates the home rule provisions of the Ohio Constitution.

Chair Ray, ranked choice voting is a failed experiment across the country and even in our own state. It has no place in Ohio, and I am asking the members of this committee to join us in supporting this legislation to not just bring awareness to the issue as we prepare for the possibility of a ranked choice voting constitutional amendment battle in the future, but because it is the right thing to do.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 63. We would be more than happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

ⁱ Majority Oppose Ranked Choice Voting For Arlington Election: <https://patch.com/virginia/arlington-va/majority-oppose-ranked-choice-voting-arlington-election-survey>

ⁱⁱ Alameda County Finds Error In Ranked Choice Election: <https://abc7news.com/ranked-choice-voting-oakland-school-board-director-district-4-race-mike-hutchinson-alameda-county-registrar-of-voters/12626221>

ⁱⁱⁱ Gavin Newsom Vetoes Bill To Allow Ranked Choice Voting Across California: <https://www.sfchronicle.com/politics/article/Gavin-Newsom-vetoes-bill-to-allow-ranked-choice-14535193.php>

^{iv} Ballot Measures to Upend State Election Systems Failed Across the Country: <https://www.npr.org/2024/11/08/nx-s1-5183210/nonpartisan-primary-ranked-choice-voting-results>