

Testimony in support of Ohio SB 63

Presented to the General Government Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives

By Trent England for Save Our States Action, a project of People for Opportunity

Trust in elections requires uniform rules that voters understand. Ranked-choice voting, or RCV, makes elections more complicated. This is true from the very beginning of the process through the end—particularly if the margin is close enough to require a recount. RCV also makes the process slower, sometimes delaying results by weeks. In one recent case, it led to a failed election in Oakland, California. For all these reasons, the Committee should protect Ohio voters from RCV by advancing SB 63.

RCV ballots are longer and more complex than normal ballots. With many more bubbles to fill in, there are more opportunities to make a potentially disenfranchising mistake. The instructions printed at the beginning of the ballot, or accompanying it, are likewise longer and more complicated. At polling places, this means it takes longer to vote. When voting by mail, this means more pages and, sometimes, more postage.

Tabulating RCV ballots is fundamentally different than normal vote counting. All ballots must be obtained and their data centralized before a computer system can begin the tabulation algorithm. The system must be programmed correctly, according to election rules, because mistakes are difficult to detect once the process has begun.

The failed election in Oakland shows how RCV can confuse voters and election administrators alike, leading to a disaster for democracy. In a three-way election for a school board seat, some voters failed to rank a candidate first but did rank a candidate second. The rules said these rankings should have been “moved up” and counted in the first round. Instead, the RCV software was programmed to ignore these ballots in round one.

The result was that the wrong candidate was eliminated in that first round—and *nobody noticed* until nearly two months later. RCV confusion caused 235 voters to leave a gap in their rankings. RCV complexity caused an election official to make a mistake setting up the county’s tabulation software. RCV’s lack of transparency meant that nobody caught the mistake until after certification. While things can go wrong in any election process, RCV creates more opportunities for failure while making it harder to detect.

Voter participation depends on trust in elections. So does the legitimacy of democratic institutions. RCV threatens to reduce trust, participation, and legitimacy. At the same time, it fails to produce offsetting benefits. For these reasons, the Committee should advance SB 63 and Ohio should take a strong stand against any use of RCV.