Common Cause
Ohio
Holding Power Accountable

Testimony on Senate Bill 63

Before the Ohio House General Government Committee

By Mia Lewis, Common Cause Ohio

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Chair Ray, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Brent and members of the House General Government Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 63.

My name is Mia Lewis and I'm Associate Director of Common Cause Ohio. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to open, honest and accountable government that serves the public interest. I am here today to voice our opposition to Senate Bill 63.

In sum, we believe it is short sighted to stifle a reform that seeks to address some of the challenges of representative democracy. We believe it is also short sighted not to allow potentially meaningful reforms and instead to actively prevent even local entities from making their own decisions about what will work best for them.

This bill is not just about prohibiting a Rank Choice Voting system for state elections; it prohibits them in some cases and provides significant disincentives in other cases, even in supposedly "home rule" entities. Why dissuade local governments from exploring a system of voting that may work better for their communities?

States are often called the laboratories of democracy. Not only do different states with differing populations and circumstances find their own way to structure and manage the intricacies of statewide elections, so too should counties, townships, cities and other entities within a state each work to find what works best for their own local elections.

Truly, there is no one best and proper way to structure elections. Just as Ohio would not want to be forced to operate under the identical rules as Michigan, Oklahoma, or any other state, there is no one size fits all for Ohio's many layers of government. Seeking to impose a one-size-fits-all solution on Ohio's diverse regions and layers of government is a recipe for frustration. It's also totally unnecessary.

Elections should represent voters' choices fairly and accurately. Ranked Choice Voting gives voters more freedom to choose candidates based on their preferences instead of their expected electability. This system encourages candidates to campaign to larger audiences, including constituencies they may have otherwise counted out. Candidates will need to persuade voters to list them as a second or third choice and may discourage candidates from smearing others to avoid losing voters' support. This kind of restraint and reasonableness is desperately needed in our elections today.

Traditional elections in the U.S. can make voters feel their choices are limited. It might seem like there is a predetermined winner — typically the most well-connected or well-funded. Or, voters may feel like they are choosing the lesser of two evils in order to prevent a worst-case scenario. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) can help. Why prohibit any Ohio municipality or other entity from deciding for themselves if they want to give it a try?

In conclusion, I strongly urge this committee to vote NO on Senate Bill 63. Thank you and I'm happy to answer any questions.