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WRITTEN/VERBAL OPPONENT TESTIMONY OF Jaimie Paul Schwartz
Constituent of Ohio Senate District 25

Hearing on Senate Bill No. 63, "Generally Prohibit The Use of Ranked Choice Voting"

Chairman (Chairwoman) Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear and members of the Senate General Government Committee:

My name is Jaimie Schwartz, a constituent from Ohio Senate District 25. Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on Senate Bill 63, legislation that would prohibit Ranked Choice Voting.

I am a big fan of Democracy, particularly, the kind that thrives in the United States. Voting for our elected representatives is one of the great and sacred rights we have in this Democracy, and I feel very strongly that my Ohio legislature should be *encouraging*, not discouraging or eliminating, use of Rank Choice Voting since it is a widely used and well-tested approach to voting. It's but one path to a healthy constitutional democracy. Why would you want to tear up the path?

I grew up in Columbus, and I spent 25 years living and working in Portland, Maine. In 2016, Maine voters approved rank choice voting. And it worked. Despite opponents' complaints and worries that it was too complicated for voters, people used it, and it resulted in better, fairer democracy for the state of Maine since it encouraged efficiency and produced results that went right to the heart of why we vote: the winner was decided fairly and by majority. Voters are smart enough to figure out who they want to vote for, and they are also smart enough to figure out how to fill out a ballot.

When I was a kid when there was disagreement inside a group of us, say, what movie to see, or whether to play basketball or baseball that summer day, we decided the disagreement by majority vote. It was our instinct because it feels fundamentally fair to go with the majority, even if you're in the minority. I was reminded of this basic lesson in 2010 in Maine when the governor's race was won by plurality: the winner received 38% of the vote. I did not vote for that candidate. Others who did not vote for the plurality winner adorned their cars with a bumper sticker that had "61%" inside an outline of the state of Maine. That bumper sticker was a graphic reminder that 61+ percent of the voters did not vote for the governor. That result is like a reverse mandate.

If Maine had had rank choice voting at the time of that election, and the winner of the 38% total instead received 51% of the vote via the rank choice voting instant runoff, I would have felt much more comfortable with the results, since he would have won a majority of the vote. “Fair’s fair,” like we said when we were kids.

I have heard it said that rank choice voting encourages civility among candidates. Well, in my experience, it is true. Case in point is a particular mayoral race in Portland. One of the candidates was very popular among his supporters, but ran a somewhat divisive campaign. He tended to alienate voters who supported his opponents, thus translating into that candidate not ending up as a Number 2 on many people’s ballots. That was the reason in my opinion that he lost. Had he been more civil, had he found common ground with some of his opponents, perhaps he would have won.

Rank choice voting has another benefit: it eliminates the need for runoffs, which are expensive and don’t produce a result anyone (other than the maybe the winner) can feel good about. In many jurisdictions, failure of a candidate to win a majority results in a separate election, a runoff. Runoff elections are typically poorly attended due to many factors, but one thing is for sure: very few runoffs have turnout that is anywhere near the regular election or primary that they follow. So, a whole new smaller subset of voters decides a majority winner, resulting in the likelihood that mathematically the winner gets even fewer votes than she or he received before, and maybe even fewer votes than her or his opponent received before. How does that fit into the “fair’s fair” algorithm?

One last but very important thing: I can say that filling out a rank-choice ballot just feels good. In Maine, there are often strong independent candidates. To let my city or state know whom I pick for my second and third choices is almost as satisfying as checking the box for my first choice. This is because it means that my vote has more chance of counting to choose the best of the multiple candidates than just one vote for one candidate. If my number one candidate is not destined to win, but I’m pretty happy with number two, my voice still counts to elect number two. And I wasn’t forced to rank every candidate, so candidates I did not want in office not get ranked by me.

I urge the good Senators to reject SB 63 as anti-democratic and unfair to the people of Ohio. It would eliminate a form of voting from our state’s democracy and our local democracies to boot. Why restrict people from locally choosing how they want to vote for their city council or representatives? There is no harm in allowing the choice of how we legally vote, and as I’ve seen, rank choice voting is not only legal, but it allowed me to feel better about election results, even if my first choice lost, since, as we said when we were kids, “fair’s fair.”

Thank you.