Testimony Against S.B. 63
Testifying as Opponent
Before the Senate General Government Committee

Submitted by: Junfang Grace Leng

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Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear and members of the Senate General Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify against Senate Bill 63. I am Junfang Grace Leng, a Dublin resident and a data scientist who volunteers in civic engagements.

I came to the United States 21 years ago for my Master's degree and have called Ohio home since then. After graduation, I have contributed my expertise in insurance, including data analysis supporting the passage of Ohio's Distracted Driving law in 2023. In 2018, I proudly became a U.S. citizen.

However, I'm deeply concerned about increasing polarization in our politics. People who vote differently increasingly dislike each other or even treat each other as enemies. This doesn't resemble the country I once knew.

As an analytical person, I sought root causes and solutions. Our current voting system appears to contribute significantly to this issue. The current pick-one system doesn't require majority support (50%). In crowded fields, especially primaries, a winner can prevail with as little as 20% support, incentivizing candidates to cater to their base rather than find common ground. This fuels division in our society.

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) offers a proven solution to reduce polarization. The majority-wins rule incentivizes candidates to attract both first and secondary support, encouraging civil campaigning and cross-party collaboration. The research article *Civility in Ranked-Choice Voting Elections: Does Evidence Fit the Normative Narrative?* (published on June 4, 2023 in Journal of Representative Democracy) found that "voters in RCV cities viewed campaigns as less negative". Campaign messages focus more on issues important to the majority.

That's why states adopting RCV have shown evidence of reduced polarization:
- It has elected moderate Congress members like Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK).
- In separate races, Alaska elected both Democratic (Mary Peltola) and Republican (Nick Begich) representatives known for bipartisanship.

- In Alaska, RCV led to bipartisan endorsements and the formation of a bipartisan coalition in the State Senate.

These are refreshing changes that we need to shift our political culture. The encouraging results have also motivated more support or interest in RCV across the political spectrum. For example: former Senator Rob Portman has indicated that RCV is among "two subjects his new academic center will tackle as it studies how to promote bipartisanship." (*Former Sen. Rob Portman: Ranked-choice voting, other primary election reforms could reduce political polarization*, news on Cleveland.com, published on October 29, 2023.)

While introducing new systems takes time and effort, RCV hasn't increased voting errors in elections where it's used. It "produced fewer void votes than the status-quo ballot type". (*More Expression, Less Error Alternative Ballots Outperform Status Quo*, published on October 15th, 2020 on New America)

I urge you to vote NO on SB 63. Ohio needs RCV to bridge divides, unite people, and encourage politicians to respond to majority voters' needs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Junfang Grace Leng