

February 18, 2024

Christopher Stevens
8050 N Clippinger Drive
Cincinnati, OH 45243

Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the General Government Committee:

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 137. My name is Christopher Stevens and I am a resident of Cincinnati. I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 137, currently under consideration by this esteemed committee. I believe that SB 137 poses significant concerns that warrant careful reconsideration.

SB 137 does not enhance our state, but instead would be a step backward, undermining the very principles that our democracy should uphold. This law would bully local communities from adopting a type of election reform that would benefit their communities by taking away crucial state funding necessary for the local citizens.

Ranked-choice voting is not a threat; rather, it represents a straightforward enhancement to our existing voting system. This method enables voters to rank candidates according to their preferences, ensuring that no candidate secures office without obtaining a majority of support. Its objective is to tackle the problem of candidates winning with less than 50% +1 support, all while empowering voters to express their genuine first-choice preferences without the concern of strategically voting for the "lesser of two evils."

Ranked-choice voting (RCV) is already being used in 51 cities, counties, and states throughout the United States, spanning three counties, absentee military ballots, and two state and general elections. Ohio is no stranger to this voting system, as five cities—Ashtabula, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Hamilton, and Toledo—have all embraced RCV at some point to elect their city councils. The success of RCV in these instances was evident as it gave substantial minorities their fair share of representation on city councils for the first time. Powerful interests didn't like that fair representation, and led the repeal efforts, often using racist fear tactics.

SB 137 also poses a direct threat to home rule by compelling localities to follow state mandated voting rules through the leverage of state funding. Our state government should not dictate how Ohioans exercise their local voting preferences. If a community concludes that ranked-choice voting (RCV) is the most effective means to secure fair representation while addressing nonpartisanship and negative campaigning, it should not face the withholding of state funding due to that choice. The autonomy of localities in making decisions that best serve their residents should be respected and preserved.

Ultimately, SB 137 does not seek to safeguard or benefit Ohio voters; rather, its objective is to shield those at risk of losing influence. Anything that empowers voters deserves celebration and protection. The resounding voices of voters during Issue 1 on August 8th, 2023, demonstrated their capacity to make informed decisions. To maintain this empowerment, it is crucial to oppose SB 137 and its underlying principles. Let's uphold and protect ranked-choice voting (RCV) and home rule in Ohio!

Sincerely,

