

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

Thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts about SB 137. I have been studying Ranked Choice Voting for 35 years, since I first heard about it in 1988. It has the potential to increase bipartisanship, reduce gerrymandering, and lead us to a more fair and vibrant democracy.

Majority rule is fundamental to democracy. It is better to have elected officials who received a majority, not a minority, of the votes.

SB137 would continue to allow candidates to win with less than a majority, as happens in our current plurality elections without runoffs.

Decisions about local government should be made at the local level. Smaller government is better. SB137 undermines our tradition of home rule which has been enshrined in the Ohio Constitution for more than a century. We should respect the voters of each community. Even if you personally oppose Ranked Choice Voting as the method of determining a majority winner, one community using RCV does no harm to any other community or to Ohio as a whole. There is no justification for a statewide prohibition of a democratic election method, depriving all local communities of the right to choose freely how to govern themselves. Let each community decide for itself.

SB137 makes voting more complicated for voters by forcing some people to vote for their second choice rather than risk helping the candidate they like least if they vote for their first choice. Ranked Choice Voting eliminates the need for voters to think and vote strategically rather than honestly. It gives **voters** the freedom to vote for their true first choice without fear that their vote will help the candidate they like least. It also gives **candidates** the freedom to run without fear of being a “spoiler.”

Ranked Choice Voting is simply a **better, faster, and cheaper** way to determine a majority winner. RCV is **better** because winners have the support of a majority, not just a plurality, of the voters. (The traditional way to get to a majority winner is a runoff election weeks later, almost always with much lower turnout than the initial election.) RCV is **faster** than a traditional runoff because it is an instant runoff election. It is **cheaper** because it saves the cost of a separate runoff election.

Misleading arguments against Ranked Choice Voting often stem from misunderstandings about what RCV is and how it works. For example, there is nothing nefarious about the first round leader failing to win in the final round of an RCV count. That also can happen in a traditional runoff election between the top two candidates in the general election. The majority winner in such a runoff may well have come in second in the general election. Claiming that the leader in the first round is unfairly

robbed if they are not ahead in the final round makes no sense. If the leading candidate (but without a majority) in the general election were automatically entitled to win a traditional runoff (or the final round of RCV vote counting), there would be no point in having a runoff election. The whole point of having a runoff (traditional or RCV) is to determine a **majority** winner. There is no winner until that majority is achieved. First-past-the-post is fine, as long as “the post” is 50% plus one.

Another misleading argument is that with RCV voters will be forced to rank ALL of the candidates, even those they oppose, and thus will have to spend a great deal of time and effort learning about all of the candidates. Under Ranked Choice Voting, no additional burden is placed on voters, but they are given an **opportunity** they do not currently have. Each voter can rank as many or as few candidates as desired, just as each voter today can decide whether to participate in a primary, in the general election, and/or a runoff election. By ranking their choices, voters are able to indicate the candidate they would vote for if their favorite were not on the ballot (as happens in a runoff election). Each voter’s ballot always counts for their highest ranked candidate who is still in the race. This allows the runoff election to be conducted right away, without requiring voters to come back to the polls, and without the taxpayer expense of setting up all the election machinery and logistics again for an unnecessary in-person runoff.

The experience of five Ohio cities with Ranked Choice Voting in the 20th century was **not** “a failed experiment.” RCV was repealed not because it didn’t work but because it **did** work. 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 they led the repeal efforts, often using racist fear tactics.

What are proponents of SB137 afraid of? Fair representation? Majority rule?

What’s wrong with better, faster and cheaper? Ranked Choice Voting should be encouraged, not banned.

Respect the voters. Respect home rule. **Reject SB137.**

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