

February 19, 2024
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Dear Chairman Rulli, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the General Government Committee,

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to submit testimony on Senate Bill 137. My name is Junfang Grace Leng, I am a resident of the City of Dublin. I am a data scientist and I volunteer my time in civic engagements. Today, I am testifying to oppose the passage of SB 137.

I came to the United States 20 years ago for my Master's degree and have called Ohio home since then. After graduation, I have been contributing my knowledge and technical expertise in the field of insurance. I am very proud that my work was a part of the data analysis to support the passage of the Distracted Driving law in Ohio in 2023.

In 2018, I became a proud citizen of this great country. However, I have been increasingly concerned about the level of polarization in our politics. The divisiveness and hostility have gradually spilled into our society. People who vote differently increasingly dislike each other or even treat each other as enemies. And this does not look like the country I was familiar with.

As an analytical person, I set out to find the root causes and solutions. I am convinced that our current voting system contributes a big part, if not the biggest part of the reasons. The current system only allows voters to pick one candidate, and the winner does not require majority support, which is 50%. In a crowded or evenly weighted field, a winner can win with as little as 30% or even 20% of votes. Since it only matters to be voters' number 1 choice, candidates have no incentives to find common ground to work with each other. They are incentivized to differentiate themselves and attack each other to get to the front. Especially in primaries, the candidates try hard to cater to their most ardent supporters. This is how our election system is fueling polarization.

The feasible and proven solution is Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). The rule of majority-wins forces candidates to reach out to as many voters as possible, including their opponents' supporters. They can no longer only fight to be voters' first choice, they need to compete for second-choice votes as well. That's why in states that adopted RCV we see a shift to more civil campaigning. The campaign messages will be focused more on issues cared by majority voters and it incentivizes the candidates to collaborate across the party line and get things done for the people. This is the refreshing change that we need to shift our political culture to bring the country together. 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". The encouraging results have also motivated more support or interest in RCV across the political

spectrum. 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.”

No matter how good a system is, it always takes time and effort to introduce a new system. The good news is that the voting errors are not higher in elections where RCV is used. It “produced fewer void votes (more valid 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 ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on SB 137. The great state of Ohio needs RCV to bridge the divide, unite the people, and incentivize politicians to respond to the needs of majority voters. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Junfang Grace Leng