

February 20, 2024

Written Opponent Testimony For SB 137

To Mr. Chairman Rulli and Members of the General Government Committee,

I am writing to oppose passage of SB 137. Rank Choice Voting (also known as Instant Runoff Voting) has a long history in the United States and other countries. Currently, ranked choice voting is successfully used for statewide elections in Alaska and Maine and in other places at the local level. Some people say that ranked choice voting is “too complicated” but this is not the case. Voters are simply asked to rank candidates from the one they like the most to the one they like the least. We are all familiar with ranking basic preferences. For example, suppose I went to a kids birthday party and told them we had three flavors of ice cream—vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry. Then I asked each child to tell me how they would rank these flavors from most liked to least liked. I am certain that most children would be able to answer this question. It is the same with ranked choice voting—we simply ask voters to tell us their first choice, second choice, and so on.

But what if there are a lot of candidates and I don't know who all of them are? Wouldn't this complicate things? Not at all. You can rank the ones you know and then ignore the rest. Or, if you wish, you can select your favorite candidate as your first choice and leave all of the others blank. This is the beauty of ranked choice voting...it allows more choice (and voice!) for the voter.

Polling in 2016 showed that around 45% of voters do not even vote. When asked why, their number one reason was that “no one represents me.” Ranked choice voting can help solve this problem. Since a candidate has to win majority support, this means that the majority of voters showed SOME interest in this candidate (even if the candidate was not their first choice). For this reason, ranked choice voting has been shown to increase voter turnout and encourages campaigns to focus on issues (instead of personal attacks).

Given the many positives of ranked choice voting, I have to ask why this bill and why now? Why should politicians in Columbus care if I use ranked choice voting to elect my local mayor or council members? This bill is clearly an attack on home rule. The Ohio Supreme Court has ruled that ranked choice voting falls under home rule and cannot be outlawed on the state level. Threatening to financially penalize any local government that uses ranked choice voting is clearly a way to get around this ruling. It is your job to uphold the state constitution; therefore, I respectfully ask you to please vote against SB 137.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Sonya Charles

1173 Erieview Road
Cleveland Heights, OH 44121