

Statement Before The
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Monday, February 3, 2020
2:05 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

in consideration of
HB 2121
RELATING TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING.

Chair LEE, Vice Chair SAN BUENAVENTURA, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Common Cause Hawaii supports HB 2121, which establishes ranked choice voting (RCV) for special federal elections and special elections of vacant county council seats.

Common Cause Hawaii is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to reforming government and strengthening democracy through voting modernization efforts such as adopting RCV.

RCV is a simple electoral reform that ensures fair and efficient elections. In a traditional election, the candidate with the most votes wins, even if they do not receive a majority of the votes. This means voters often feel disengaged and are left to choose between the “lesser of two evils,” or vote for the candidate they feel has the best chance of winning, rather than supporting their favorite candidates.

RCV promotes positive, inclusive and fair elections, which encourages a diversity of candidates.

With RCV, voters rank candidates from favorite to least favorite. On Election Night, first choice votes are counted to determine who voters like the best. If a candidate receives a majority of votes, they win. If no candidate receives a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-choice rankings is eliminated. If your favorite candidate is eliminated, your vote is instantly counted for your next choice. This repeats until one candidate reaches a majority and wins.

In RCV elections, you always get to vote for your favorite candidate, even if they do not have a good chance of winning. If your favorite candidate gets eliminated, then your vote immediately counts for your next choice. You can truly vote your conscience without worrying about wasting your vote. Ranking your 2nd, 3rd, and 4th choices will never hurt your favorite candidate. It simply amplifies your voice in the process.

Cities that have RCV elections have seen a steady increase in voter turnout. When voters feel their vote will matter, they turn out in greater numbers.

In RCV elections, candidates often need 2nd and 3rd choice votes to win a majority of the vote. As such, they will ask for your first choice vote, but if another candidate is your favorite, they will also ask for your second and third choices. Candidates are not likely to get your second or third choice vote if they have been engaging in negative “mudslinging” personal attacks against your favorite candidate.

RCV will require voter education to implement successfully. Common Cause Hawaii hopes that the Office of Elections and Clerks' Offices are provided with sufficient public education tools to implement RCV and will work cooperatively with the community to disseminate information about RCV.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2121. If you have further questions of me, please contact me at sma@commoncause.org.

Very respectfully yours,

Sandy Ma
Executive Director, Common Cause Hawaii



HB-2121

Submitted on: 2/2/2020 8:54:28 AM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Tracy Ryan	The Libertarian Party of Hawaii	Support	No

Comments:

This is a good idea as it allows voters greater ability to vote for people, rather than defensively voting against them.



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www.lwv-hawaii.com | 808.531.7448 | voters@lwv-hawaii.com

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Monday, February 3, 2020, 2:05 p.m, Room 325
HB2121 RELATING TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING

TESTIMONY

Janet Mason, Legislative Committee, League of Women Voters of Hawaii

Chair Lee, Vice-Chair San Buenaventura, and Committee Members:

Ranked Choice Voting is a topic of interest to the League. The League does not oppose Ranked Choice Voting, but we have declined to subject this topic to the rigorous program of study we undertake in order to form an official position. This year, we have instead focused our efforts on the urgent need to pass Automatic Voter Registration and educate voters about Voting by Mail. These priorities are motivated by the League's goal of increasing voter turnout - for us, that means putting registration and education first in 2020.

The League is aware of the use of Ranked Choice Voting by the Hawaii Democratic Party in its upcoming Presidential Primary¹, the first election of a United States Representative using this process in Maine in 2018², and a rise in its use in municipal elections throughout the country³.

Ranked Choice Voting has the potential for increased turnout, election campaigns that are less polarized, and a representative result - one where the winner receives the majority of votes. The League shares an interest in these outcomes. However, our experience with voter education, including our recent efforts with Vote by Mail, informs us that adoption of any significant change to how a voter casts their ballot must be accompanied by a comprehensive, well-funded program of voter education. Adoption of Ranked Choice Voting at the state level without such educational efforts risks voter confusion which would far outweigh the previously mentioned benefits.

We welcome the efforts of groups to educate voters about Ranked Choice Voting, and welcome experimentation with it among civic groups and political parties. We are also willing to work with this body and other civic organizations to develop such an educational program to ease the adoption of Ranked Choice Voting, should that be the choice of this legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



Board of Directors:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Gary L. Hooser
President

Monday, February 3, 2020, 2:05 PM, Conference Room 325

Hawaii Alliance for Progressive Action SUPPORTS HB 2121

Andrea N. Brower
Ikaika M. Hussey
Co-Vice Presidents

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair San Buenaventura, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Kim Coco Iwamoto
Treasurer

The Hawaii Alliance for Progressive Action supports HB 2121, which ranked choice voting (RCV) for special federal elections and special elections of vacant county council seats.

Bart E. Dame
Secretary

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Paul Achitoff

Laura Harrelson

Kaleikoa Ka’eo

Michael Miranda

Walter Ritte Jr.

RCV promotes positive, inclusive and fair elections, which encourages a diversity of candidates.

Pua Rossi-Fukino

Karen Shishido

Leslie Malulani Shizue Miki

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RCV will require voter education to implement successfully. HAPA hopes that the Office of Elections and Clerks’ Offices are provided with sufficient public education tools to implement RCV and will work cooperatively with the community to disseminate information about RCV.

Mahalo for your consideration. HAPA is a member of the Common Good Coalition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Frederick", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anne Frederick
Executive Director

HB-2121

Submitted on: 2/1/2020 2:58:10 PM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Gerard Silva	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments:

HB-2121

Submitted on: 2/1/2020 7:13:26 PM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Jun Shin	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

HB-2121

Submitted on: 2/1/2020 11:29:51 PM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Caroline Kunitake	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chair LEE, Vice Chair SAN SUENAVENTURA, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Please support HB2121.

RCV is a simple electoral reform that ensures fair and efficient elections. In a traditional election, the candidate with the most votes wins, even if they do not receive a majority of the votes. This means voters often feel disengaged and are left to choose between the “lesser of two evils,” or vote for the candidate they feel has the best chance of winning, rather than supporting their favorite candidates.

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Mahalo,

Caroline Kunitake

HB-2121

Submitted on: 2/2/2020 4:28:34 AM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Barbara Best	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

HB-2121

Submitted on: 2/2/2020 4:40:16 AM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
David Imai	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments:

I support the intent of the bill, which is to replace Plurality Voting with a better method. But I do not believe that Ranked Choice Voting is the best method to replace Plurality Voting, because it will introduce new problems.

Political scientists have studied many different voting methods. A good summary of research can be found at <https://www.lesswrong.com/posts/D6trAzh6DApKPhbv4> . Whenever there are three or more candidates in a contest, the method we currently use, Plurality Voting or First Past the Post, is generally considered one of the worst methods. It can produce problems like vote splitting and the Spoiler Effect. It should be replaced. But what can replace it?

The method proposed in this bill is called Ranked Choice, aka Instant Runoff Voting. It will give better results in many situations, but at the cost of having a much more complicated voting and vote-counting system.

- It will require extensive and perhaps expensive reprogramming of the vote counting programs. Complexity increases the chance of errors. Programming errors could lead to incorrect election results. The more complicated system for determining the winner could lead to delays in determining the winner.
- It is very different from the current system and will require a training for the voters. A new type of ballot will have to be designed, and voters will have to be trained on how to vote on it. The more complex ballot design will lead to more spoiled ballots.
- It requires voters to rank every candidate separately even though they may prefer to rank them on only two or three tiers. A voter cannot express indifference between candidates.
- What if a voter only ranks some of the candidates, because he or she is indifferent to them or does not have enough information about them? Or what if a voter ranks two candidates the same because he or she has no preference between them? According to the bill, their ballots are "Inactive ballots" and will not be counted. This could result in a lot of people's votes not being counted.
- It lacks transparency: it is hard to briefly explain how the winner came out on top. For example, if there are five candidates, there are 120 possible permutations or orderings of the candidates. These would have to be carefully analyzed to

determine the winner, not an easy task for the average person. Lack of transparency could result in more challenges to the results.

- Ranked Choice voting can lead to a situation in which the candidate who is the second choice of nearly everyone is eliminated early because of not enough first-place votes. Because of its emphasis on voters' first choice, it often will not improve on Plurality voting.
- Voters may vote strategically by giving a last-place ranking to the chief rival of their favored candidate.

There are simpler and less disruptive systems than Ranked Choice or Instant Runoff Voting. One is called Approval Voting. In Approval Voting, voters vote for all the candidates they approve, without being restricted to voting for only one. The votes are counted and the candidate with the most votes is the winner. That's it. It would require very little change from our current system.

Another system is Score Voting or Range voting. This is familiar because it is used on many surveys. It is also used for product ratings in catalogs, and movie and restaurant reviews. Each candidate is rated on a scale, such as from 1 to 10 or -1 to 1, and the scores are totaled for each candidate. It would require a different ballot design, but is still simpler than Ranked Choice.

Does Ranked Choice perform better than Approval voting and Score voting? One attempt to compare voting systems is Voter Satisfaction Efficiency. A very detailed series of computer simulations comparing various voting methods can be found at <http://electionscience.github.io/vse-sim/VSE/>. The results show that Approval Voting performing as well as or better than IRV (another name for Ranked Choice), and Score Voting was better than either one. Another measure is called Bayesian regret, which tries to measure how satisfied voters would be under a wide range of different circumstances. This page <https://rangevoting.org/BayRegDum.html> ranks Score Voting and Approval Voting higher than Ranked Choice Voting (IRV).

There is no reason to implement a complex method when a much simpler method will do the job.

LATE

HB-2121

Submitted on: 2/3/2020 11:22:05 AM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
D. Choy	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Good Morning Esteemed Chair and members of the committee,

I applaud this bill for proposing ranked choice voting. This bill appears to be substantially if not identical to Bill SB427 from the 2019 session. Ranked choice voting should eventually be enacted for all elections for two key reasons:

First, it is a tool for depolarization of politics. When parties and candidates must appeal to the whole electorate to achieve a majority vote, they temper their stances, platforms, and rhetoric, or risk alienating large swaths of voters who otherwise might pick them as their second, or third preference. Elections become less about partisan antics and more policy. Candidates must craft ideas and visions that consider a plethora of views, experiences, and issues. Politicians' base voters become less important and the acrimony that is poisoning this country will fade away. It seems nationwide, the most vocal critics of ranked choice voting are those who benefit from increasingly hateful polarization.

Second, it is the closest thing we can get to truly representative democracy short of proportional representation. The current system effectively allows the slimmest margin to win the race sometimes with a bare plurality of votes which essentially ignores the voices of the majority of voters split among other candidates. If you truly wish to represent the people in this building of the people, then their preferences of those people should be respected.

It is troublesome that virtually all the testimony in opposition last year was from registered Republicans. Why are Republicans opposed to election reform and increased political competition, especially in a state they often decry as politically monopolistic? Furthermore, under the current system, their numbers have steadily dwindled to single digits, so why not shake up the system, after all isn't that why they voted for Trump?

Finally, one common argument against ranked choice voting is that it is more complex in how people vote. Perhaps it is with its complicated formulas, but increased complexity is no excuse to settle for less representative government. Simplicity is a hereditary dictatorship, do those who complain about complexity want that? This is a good start for ranked voting in Hawaii and I urge you to pass it with strong support.

