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COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Wednesday, February 19, 2020, 10:00 a.m., Conf. Room 211
SB 2006 SD1, RELATING TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING

TESTIMONY

D. Piilani Kaopuiki, President, League of Women Voters of Hawaii

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Keith-Agaran, 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 provide voter education resources, particularly for 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 actually gets 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.

The passage of Vote by Mail took six years and by necessity included a state-funded education and awareness program - one we were happy to help develop. The continued advocacy and experimentation with Ranked Choice Voting is its own education program - but nothing can replace a voter education program supported by the state government. Should Ranked Choice Voting be adopted for use in elections run by the state, we must apply our lessons from Vote by Mail and



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educate, educate, educate. Our voters deserve to know how their vote will be counted should the legislature change the method of tabulation, and why such a change was made. Only through such efforts can those benefits be realized.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

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1. Risch, Emily. "In a win that ensures more votes will count, Hawaii and Kansas to use Ranked Choice Voting Ballots in 2020 Primaries". *FairVote*. https://www.fairvote.org/hawaii_and_kansas_to_use_ranked_choice_voting_ballots_in_2020_primaries, accessed 23 December 2019.
 2. Mistler, Steve. "Golden Wins Nation's First Ranked-Choice Voting Runoff for a Congressional Seat". *Maine Public*. <https://www.mainepublic.org/post/golden-wins-nations-first-ranked-choice-voting-runoff-congressional-seat>, accessed 23 December 2019.
 3. "Where is Ranked Choice Voting Being Used?". *FairVote*. https://www.fairvote.org/rcv#where_is_ranked_choice_voting_used, accessed 23 December 2019.

Statement Before The
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANSWednesday, February 19, 2020
10:00 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 211in consideration of
SB 2006, SD1
RELATING TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING.

Chair DELA CRUZ, Vice Chair KEITH-AGARAN, and Members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee

Common Cause Hawaii supports SB 2006, SD1, 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. See <https://www.fairvote.org/research/rcvvoterturnout>. 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 significant voter education to implement successfully. Common Cause Hawaii greatly appreciates that SB 2006, SD1 requires the State Office of Elections to conduct voter education on RCV prior to any election where it will be used and allows the Office of Elections to work with community partners and non-profit entities to enhance educational outreach. Common Cause Hawaii hopes to work with the Office of Elections and County Clerks’ Offices to implement RCV and disseminate information about RCV.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2006, SD1, and Common Cause Hawaii respectfully urges the committee members to pass SB 2006, SD1 out of your Committee. If you have further questions of me, please contact me at sma@commoncause.org.

Very respectfully yours,

Sandy Ma
Executive Director, Common Cause Hawaii

SB-2006-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/15/2020 5:03:13 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2020 10:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Members of the Committee on Ways and Means,

I am writing in support of SB2006.

- 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.

Please pass this bill.

Mahalo,

Caroline Kunitake

SB-2006-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/15/2020 5:53:26 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2020 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
John Bickel	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Ranked choice voting makes sense for elections where a plurality may subvert the will of the majority.

SB-2006-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/17/2020 8:39:29 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2020 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Susan Dursin	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I urge your support for this bill which would allow ranked choice voting. In the face of Hawaii's rather shockingly low voter turnout, ranked choice offers voters the feeling that their choices count. Even when their favorite candidate does not win, their backup choices may lead to the success of candidates supported by a majority of voters. This makes good sense. It also enables candidates who otherwise would not have won a majority of votes to understand that they have the support of many voters and a responsibility to them.

As you well know, elections and governing mean we cannot all have exactly what we want. With ranked choice, we can at least have more of what we want.

LATE

SB-2006-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2020 3:58:58 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2020 10:00:00 AM

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 the current voting procedure, Plurality Voting, with a better method. However, there are many possible methods that have been proposed by social scientists, and I do not think that proper consideration has been given to the pros and cons of different methods. Until other methods have been considered, we should not rush to adopt ranked-choice, which may not be the best system for us.

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.

A voter cannot express indifference between candidates. 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 if a voter ranks two candidates the same because he or she has no preference between them, then 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.

Before this system is adopted, other systems should be considered. There are simpler and less disruptive system 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.

SB-2006-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2020 9:45:04 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2020 10:00:00 AM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
tlaloc tokuda	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

- I supportt SB 2006
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- 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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- 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.

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- 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 significant voter education to implement successfully. Common Cause Hawaii greatly appreciates that SB 2006, SD1 requires the State Office of Elections to conduct voter education on RCV prior to any election where it will be used and allows the Office of Elections to work with community partners and non-profit entities to enhance educational outreach. Common Cause Hawaii hopes to work with the Office of Elections and County Clerks’ Offices to implement RCV and disseminate information about RCV.