SB-427-SD-1
Submitted on: 2/26/2019 6:08:15 PM
Testimony for WAM on 2/28/2019 10:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Melodie Aduja	Testifying for O`ahu County Committee on Legislative Priorities of the Democratic Party of Hawai`i	Support	No

Comments:

Testimony in **SUPPORT of SB427** Relating to Elections
By Rob Richie, FairVote Action President
February 28, 2019

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee:

I am writing to express FairVote Action's support for SB427, regarding ranked ranked choice voting in certain vacancy elections. FairVote Action is a national nonpartisan organization that educates and advocates for electoral system reforms that improve democracy in our elections. We work closely with FairVote, our 501-c-3 partner organization at FairVote.org, which I have led as executive director and now president and CEO since 1992. We are seen as a leading national resource on ranked choice voting (RCV), and we work closely in the growing number of states and cities using RCV, including in statewide elections in Maine and elections in nine cities in the past 15 months and in the nine cities scheduled to use RCV for the first time later this year.

SB 427 would improve elections in Hawaii. If SB427 were enacted, RCV would be used in those special elections for federal office that are not held with regularly scheduled primary and general elections, and counties would use it to fill county council vacancy elections. SB427 deserves support as it upholds the principles of majority rule and representative democracy.

RCV ensures that elections are won with majorities without the need for a costly, inefficient runoff elections. In a RCV election, voters rank candidates in order of choice: their first choice, with an option to rank backup preferences as a second choice, third choice and so on. All first choices are counted with a value of one vote. If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, they win, just like any other election. If not, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who picked that candidate as 'number 1' will have their votes count for their next choice. The process continues until two candidates remain. The winner will always have a majority of the vote when matched head-to-head against his or her final round opponent.

SB427 would mean that even in a crowded field such as those often seen in vacancy elections, a representative winner will be selected with just one election without the risk of vote-splitting. All voters are able to participate in a single, decisive election that produces a consensus winner.

RCV's simplicity, representative outcomes, and positive experience for voters have made it an increasingly popular election method. Recommended by Robert's Rules of Order and used in hundreds of private association elections, RCV is fully constitutional, having been twice upheld in federal courts, including in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal in 2011 and in district court in Maine in 2018. RCV is used in 11 cities, and another 11 cities and counties in the past year have acted to use RCV in their upcoming elections.

Last year, Maine became the first state to adopt RCV for use at the state and federal level, including in the seven-candidate Democratic primary and four-candidate Republican primary for governor in June and in three multi-candidate U.S. Senate and U.S. House elections in November. Despite RCV being introduced to voters without an appropriation for voter education, Maine voters responded very well to the system. More votes were cast in the Democratic primary than any in state history, and voter turnout increased in November. The percentage of Maine voters who skipped the US Senate and U.S. House races held with RCV dropped sharply from recent elections for those offices without RCV, and voter error was miniscule -- more than 99.8% cast valid ballots. A Bangor Daily News exit survey found that more than 60% of voters want to keep RCV for congressional elections and a majority to extend it to governor; a huge majority of voters reported it was easy to vote with RCV.

This first use in Maine mirrors what we have seen elsewhere. As implementation of RCV becomes straightforward and candidates adjust to the new rules, RCV consistently works well. Among examples: 1) in San Francisco in June 2018, more city voters chose to cast an RCV ballot for mayor than a non-RCV ballot for governor and U.S. Senator; 2) in Santa Fe's first use of RCV in March 2018, voter turnout was sharply up from its comparably contested mayoral election in 2014, 99.9% cast valid ballots, more than three in five voters ranked all five candidates, and RCV results were released on election night; 3) in Minneapolis, a comprehensive city staff report on the November 2017 election provided a range of evidence on how well voters are using RCV and that fewer than one in five voters would prefer not voting with RCV.

Scholarly research about older elections is encouraging as well. In 2013 and 2014 for example, the Rutgers-Eagleton poll conducted a study examining the experiences of voters in RCV and non-RCV cities in seven cities, including four in California. 84% of voters reported understanding RCV; indeed, more voters understood RCV thoroughly than they did plurality voting (limited to one preference). More voters also understood RCV than California's top two runoff system. Majorities of voters across all 7 cities supported keeping their RCV system.

Hawaii's current vacancy law is an accident that continues to happen. Several winners of vacancy elections in the past decade have won with well under half the votes cast. Limiting voters to one choice in crowded vacancy election fields in fact can be seen as a literal form of voter suppression. Consider that in high-profile races with RCV, nearly nine in ten voters will indicate at least a second choice as a backup -- like in the mayoral elections in the past year in Santa Fe and San Francisco and in the Democratic primary for governor in Maine, where more than three times as many voters chose to rank at least six of the seven candidates as chose to rank only one. Yet Maine's old rules and Hawaii's current plurality system forces everyone to be limited to one preference.

This issue of RCV has come before the legislature in Hawaii in previous years. However, the evidence has never been so strong that voters like and use RCV well and the roadmap to implementing RCV smoothly and efficiently, as detailed by the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center at RankedChoiceVoting.org. RCV is an elegant, intuitive solution to the problems seen in crowded vacancy elections. It is proven in practice, with more and more communities interested in its benefits each year. FairVote Action strongly recommends SB 427 be passed so Hawaiians can have representative outcomes in their vacancy elections.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and please don't hesitate to contact me at rr@fairvote.org or (301) 270-4616 if you have any questions.

Attached: Sample RCV ballot and election outcome from Maine elections in 2018

Ranked Choice Voting Ballot: Maine Democratic 2018 Primary for Governor

Here is the ballot used in Maine for its Democratic primary election in the governor in 2018 that resulted in the nomination of Janet Mills.

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Governor	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice	5th Choice	6th Choice	7th Choice	8th Choice
Cote, Adam Roland Sanford	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Dion, Donna J. Biddeford	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Dion, Mark N. Portland	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Eves, Mark W. North Berwick	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Mills, Janet T. Farmington	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Russell, Diane Marie Portland	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Sweet, Elizabeth A. Hallowell	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Write-in	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

RCV Election Example: *Maine xCongressional Elections, 2018*

Maine, 2nd U.S. House District Ranked choice Voting Election, November 2018			
Candidate	**Round 1**	**Round 2**	**Round 3**
Jared Golden Democrat	45.5% 128,999 votes	46.2% 130,182 votes	50.5% 139,231 votes
Bruce Poliquin Republican	46.4% 131,631 votes	47.1% 132,505 votes	49.5% 136,326 votes
Tiffany Bond Independent	5.7% 16,260 votes	6.7% 18,831 votes	*Defeated*
Will Hoar Independent	2.4% 6,753 votes	*Defeated*	

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. 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 to original bill 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.

SB-427-SD-1
Submitted on: 2/26/2019 8:18:35 PM
Testimony for WAM on 2/28/2019 10:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
lynne matusow	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments:

I do not like the idea of ranked choice voting. It is too radical.

SB-427-SD-1
Submitted on: 2/27/2019 12:03:24 AM
Testimony for WAM on 2/28/2019 10:30:00 AM

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

Comments: