

Testimony on House Bill 390
By Grace Ramsey, March 20, 2018

Co-Chair Parish and Co-Chair Zulkosky,

I am writing to express FairVote's support for HB 390, which would allow ranked choice voting to be used for: primary elections for state executive, state legislative offices, and national legislative offices, and general and special elections for state and national legislative offices. FairVote is a national nonpartisan organization that educates and advocates for electoral system reforms, like ranked choice voting, that improve democracy in our elections.

With both the Democratic and Republican primary elections this upcoming August and the general election in November, ranked choice voting could provide voters in Alaska with the opportunity to have a greater choice and a stronger voice in their elections.

In a ranked choice voting election, voters rank candidates in order of choice. All first choices are counted, and if a candidate has a majority, that candidate wins, just as in any election. If not, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. Everyone who voted for that candidate has their vote instantly go to their next choice, and the process repeats until one candidate has more than half the vote. It's easy as 1-2-3 for voters.

Alaska's current system works best when only two candidates are on the ballot, but as we've seen that is not a political reality. When there are more than two candidates on the ballot in a plurality system, independent or third party candidates are often labeled as spoilers and voters are forced to vote strategically rather than voting their conscience. Under a ranked choice system, independent or third party candidates are able to enter the race, but the spoiler effect would be eliminated and voters are able to voice their true preference.

Ranked choice voting is used in cities and states across the country. Research shows that it is liked and understood in the communities where it is used. Since Oakland and San Francisco moved to a ranked ballot, they have seen increased voter participation in a system that now ensures a majority mandate. In 2013 and 2014, a Rutgers-Eagleton poll surveyed likely voters in seven RCV cities and 14 control cities. In RCV cities, 89% of those surveyed found RCV ballots easy to understand. Understanding of RCV was comparable to understanding of plurality voting. In the 11 survey cities in California (four with RCV and seven control cities), more voters reported understanding ranked choice voting than California's top two primary runoff system. Clear majorities of voters also supported keeping their ranked choice voting system in all seven RCV cities.

Ranked choice voting is an intuitive solution to the problems seen in our elections. It is proven in practice, with more communities interested in its benefits each year. I strongly recommend HB 390 so Alaska can ensure elections are more efficient and have more representative outcomes.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. We look forward to any way we can be helpful in the future, including connecting you with the retired election officials running the RankedChoiceVoting.org project on ranked choice voting and ballot-counting. Please don't hesitate to contact me at gramsey@fairvote.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Grace Ramsey
Deputy Director of Outreach and Advocacy