

March 27, 2018

Alaska House of Representatives Community and Regional Affairs Committee  
Representatives Justin Parish and Tiffany Zulkosky, Co-Chairs

Testimony on  
House Bill 390 Ranked-Choice Primary Elections  
by Karen Brinson Bell, Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center  
Election Administration Consultant  
Former Elections Director, Transylvania County, NC  
Former District Elections Technician, State Board of Elections of North Carolina

Dear Co-Chair Zulkosky and Members of the House Community and Regional Affairs Committee:

On behalf of the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, thank you for the opportunity to comment on House Bill 390.

Having worked together overseeing statewide, municipal, and district ranked choice voting (RCV) elections, the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center Consulting Team is focused on expanding the resources and information available regarding the administration of and education about this voting method. We have developed a repository of best practices and first-hand experiences through our website [www.rankedchoicevoting.org](http://www.rankedchoicevoting.org) and our Model Implementation Plan. We provide webinars, podcasts, and presentations at no cost to assist election administrators, policy makers, candidates, and the public to identify whether RCV is an option for a jurisdiction and to assist with implementation plans including processes for tabulating results, voter education, and more.

We work closely with usability experts, equipment vendors, local clerks, audit specialists, and others. The more we learn, the clearer it becomes that RCV elections have and will work efficiently and effectively in our nation's elections, including the elections for Alaska as outlined in House Bill 390. RCV has emerged as a solution for promoting majority support, broader representation through voter choice, inclusive leadership, and civility. Our role is not advocacy focused; rather, we aim to provide resources that allow jurisdictions to overcome the perception that implementing and conducting RCV is too difficult.

Ranked choice voting has been a part of the U.S. elections process for more than 100 years. Invented in Europe in the 1850s as a proportional representation system, it was adapted to single-winner or instant runoff form in the 1870s by MIT professor William Ware. Shortly thereafter, Australia adopted the system and continues to use RCV today, along with countries such as Scotland, Ireland, and Malta. In 1915, Ashtabula, Ohio, became the first U.S. city to implement RCV, and by the 1940s, RCV was in two dozen cities across six states. However, by 1962, 23 of these 24 cities had repealed RCV for reasons largely related to party bosses realizing it was difficult to control council members once elected and newly introduced lever voting machines could not be used. Yet Cambridge, Massachusetts, has continued to use RCV for more than 70 years for city council and school board elections, and 10 additional U.S. cities currently use RCV as well. There are also five states and the city of Springfield, Illinois, that use RCV for military and overseas voting. And in June the voting method will be used statewide in Maine, while future use has been approved for Benton County, OR, and in seven other cities across the country.

Having administered ranked choice voting elections in North Carolina, I can also share first-hand experience. When the state legislature established opportunities for municipalities to pilot RCV, I helped the city of Hendersonville in 2007 and 2009 with this voting method. Analysis by North Carolina State University of exit survey results after the first RCV election concluded RCV worked as intended, and more than 85% of those voters found RCV easy to understand. In 2010, I also helped administer both statewide and district level judicial vacancy elections with RCV. This successful implementation occurred in a 3-month window, utilized existing voting equipment, was part of a ballot that included non-RCV contests, and worked within the confines of the existing election budget. Only \$200 in actual funds was spent on marketing or voter education – we worked closely with the media, issued public service announcements, and added supplemental information to the statewide judicial voter guide. Last but not least, our most effective voter education tool proved to be written and verbal instruction to the voters when they presented themselves at the polling place and in absentee-by-mail materials.

In my current capacity, the consulting team and I have analyzed the RCV-capability of existing voting equipment and are currently in the testing phase for a Universal RCV Tabulator, which is available as free, open source software to any jurisdiction or voting system vendor. While Alaska's current voting system, AccuVote TSX and AccuVote OS, does not have built-in RCV capability, data can be exported for tabulation using the Universal RCV Tabulator. If Alaska moves forward with a new voting system, including all mail balloting, the latest voting systems from the four largest vendors in the United States are all RCV capable. However, none of these vendors have a product capable of optical character recognition as proposed in HB 390, so we would encourage an amendment to the bill to allow for methods currently within the voting systems, such as column or grid ballot designs. We can provide further assessment after more in-depth discussion about your election processes and any decisions regarding ranked choice voting, all mail balloting, and change in voting systems.

Upon passage of this legislation, the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center team and I stand ready to provide assistance and resources for voter education, implementation practices, and tabulation procedures at no charge to Alaska's Division of Elections.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB390.

Sincerely,  
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