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Please permit me to extend a special thank you to co-chairs Justin Parish and Tiffany Zulkosky, and the entire House Committee on Community and Regional Affairs for the State of Alaska, for this invitation to give input regarding HB 390, the Ranked-Choice Voting bill.

My expertise is that of an academic whose primary research concerns the History of Congressional Apportionment. Associated topics include districting and voting. All are essential components in a larger picture framed by the question, what is Representation in our American democracy? History, from the time of the Framers of our Constitution, has evolved answers on the premise that the source of governmental power must come from *the people*.

Fundamental to American democracy is the right to vote. The ballot is the people's main voice box for representation. The structure of the ballot determines how much input an individual voter has in an election.

The current system of structuring the ballot is to list the options (or candidates) with the instruction, Vote for One. If there are only two options, then there is no problem. The winner is simply determined by majority vote.

However, a problem exists when there are three or more options. In this event, the Vote for One instruction is the most limiting among ballot possibilities, allowing the smallest voice for a voter. The voter gets to say something about one candidate, and then the input is over. As a result, a substantial number vote strategically rather than honestly out of concern for "throwing away their vote." Vote for One does not allow many voters to support their candidate of first choice without the fear that they will elect their least-liked candidate.

The worst-case scenario of Vote for One is that the least desirable candidate may win the election because the winner is simply the plurality winner. If there are three candidates, then two well-liked candidates may split the popular vote 33% to 31%, leaving a widely-disliked candidate the winner with 36% of the vote.

The confusion and agony of strategy vs. honesty when there are three or more ballot options can be overcome by replacing Vote for One by Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV).

The ballot would still list the same options, but the instruction to the voter is to rank the options rather than merely choose one. Thus, opportunity for voter input is extended to each ballot option, not restricted to just one option.

Of course, if a voter simply wants to just vote for one, then they only need to mark their first choice; hence, the Vote for One structure still remains for voters who want that structure. With RCV, voters who want to make additional input may continue by ranking their 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc., choices. This supports the voter who wants to be a greater participant in our democratic republic.

There are clear advantages to ranked-choice voting.

1. Voters get to provide more input and thus have more say-so in the election. Voter apathy induced by the belief that their vote doesn't really count or doesn't matter is diminished. When no candidate wins a majority of the vote in the first round of counting, then those additional ranks make a difference! The final winner is a majority, not just a plurality, winner.
2. Voters get the opportunity to vote for candidates they support, not just vote for someone as a way to vote against another they oppose most.
3. Voters can vote honestly without the guilt of throwing their vote away or playing a spoiler role and enabling their least-liked candidate to win.
4. Voters get to decide how much input they want to have given the ballot options by choosing how many candidates to rank, from one to all.
5. Ranked-choice voting decreases the probability that the least-desired candidate wins the election.

I applaud Alaska for taking the rights and input of voters seriously and considering Ranked-Choice Voting. In the early phase of the development of this nation, voting rights were usually limited to white males, at least 21 years old, who were propertied and Protestant. The evolution of voting rights in America now provides equal voting opportunity to all adult citizens in good standing. It is time that we further include the structure of the ballot in voting rights and upgrade that structure to Ranked-Choice Voting.

Thank you for your considerations.

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