



1212 New York Ave. NW
Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005
202-525-5717

Free Markets. Real Solutions.
www.rstreet.org

Testimony from:
Matthew Germer, Elections Fellow, R Street Institute

In OPPOSITION of HB 171, “A bill repealing the Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project”

February 3, 2023

House Government Operations Committee

Chair Musselman, Vice Chair Petersen and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my testimony. My name is Matthew Germer, and I conduct research on election reform for the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government across a variety of policy areas, including election reform. This is why House Bill 171 is important to us.

When it comes to election reform, state legislatures should be focused on improving the voting experience for all eligible voters while ensuring trustworthy elections. House Bill 171 undercuts these principles by eliminating the successful and popular Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project, which gives local governments the option to use ranked-choice voting (RCV) to conduct their elections.

RCV provides substantial benefits versus the traditional “plurality” election. If voters are comfortable with more than one candidate, they can say so. If they prefer a lesser-known candidate, they can show support without worrying about the spoiler effect. And because the RCV vote-tallying system continues until one candidate reaches a majority, voters have more opportunities to contribute to that victory and the winners enjoy broad support.¹ In short, RCV empowers voters.

Importantly, RCV is able to provide these benefits without substantial drawbacks. Concerns over “non-monotonicity” are more theoretical than practical and are dwarfed by the problems of plurality voting systems. Non-monotonicity occurs in an RCV election when a winner could have lost the election if a certain subset of voters had ranked them higher.² This outcome can feel disconcerting—higher rankings should mean better outcomes for a candidate—but such an election, while theoretically possible under RCV, is exceptionally rare and cannot be determined before an election. This means that the possibility of a non-monotonic outcome would not affect the way candidates run or how voters fill out their ballots.



1212 New York Ave. NW
Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005
202-525-5717

Free Markets. Real Solutions.
www.rstreet.org

Similarly, concerns over “ballot exhaustion” are unfounded and do not hold up to scrutiny.³ Under RCV, voters are empowered to vote for as few or as many candidates as they wish. If a voter chooses to vote for only one candidate and that candidate turns out to be unpopular, their vote means no less under RCV than it does under a plurality system. In fact, RCV benefits these very voters the most by offering them the chance to rank additional candidates and contribute to the final outcome of the election. RCV gives all voters more power, not less.

Any concerns with RCV must be compared to the alternative—plurality voting—which frequently creates unrepresentative outcomes. Look no further than the 2022 primary election cycle, where dozens of candidates across the country won with less than 40 percent of support, including one candidate who won with less than 21 percent.⁴ Plurality voting also places pressure on voters to determine which candidates are the most popular among their neighbors—a task that can be difficult in local elections where polling is scarce—and intrudes upon the ability for voters to vote their consciences. RCV is designed to address plurality voting’s shortcomings and triumphs in comparison.

We encourage House Government Operations Committee members to oppose House Bill 171 and continue Utah’s successful Municipal Alternate Voting Methods Pilot Project.

Thank you for your time,

Matthew Germer
Elections Fellow
R Street Institute
(714) 609-6288
mgermer@rstreet.org

¹ Matthew Germer, "Restoring Losers' Consent: A Necessary Step to Stabilizing Our Democracy," *R Street Policy Study* No. 240, September 2021. <https://www.rstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Final-No.-240.pdf>.

² Theodore Landsman, "Understanding Condorcet Winners and Non-monotonicity Through the Lens of Berkeley's District 2 City Council Race," FairVote, March 2, 2017. https://fairvote.org/understanding_condorcet_winners_and_non_monotonicity_through_the_lens_of_berkeley_s_district_2_city_council_race.

³ "Ranked-Choice Voting," Lawyers Democracy Fund, last accessed Jan. 31, 2023. <https://lawyersdemocracyfund.org/other-issues/ranked-choice-voting>.

⁴ Rachel Hutchinson, "Fewest Votes Wins: Plurality Victories in 2022 Primaries," FairVote, October 2022. <https://fairvote.org/report/fewest-votes-wins-plurality-victories-in-2022-primaries>.