



February 28, 2020

Testimony on behalf of H.F. 983

To: Subcommittee on Elections

As the Mayor of Minneapolis, I'm proud that we have been utilizing Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in our elections since 2009. As a result, we have ended the expensive and relatively low-turnout primary process in favor of RCV, which enables robust competition and has been shown to discourage negative campaign tactics.

In Minneapolis, we regularly enjoy high voter participation and turnout, and the 2017 RCV election in November was no exception. In fact, with more than 104,000 residents casting ballots, we had among our highest voter turnout in more than 20 years.

I'm confident that RCV was a key factor in that turnout because it helped make possible a diverse slate of candidates whose campaigns encouraged civil discourse focused on a range of issues critical to our city.

Thanks to our fantastic elections staff, RCV was administered smoothly and efficiently, providing a ready blueprint for other communities exploring RCV.

While there have been concerns raised about the ability of voters to understand RCV, I am happy to report that nearly 90 percent of voters ranked their ballot in the Minneapolis mayoral race. With RCV, voters could support the candidate they most believed in while still being able to indicate additional preferences if their first candidate was not successful.

I was honored to be elected with the support of a majority of voters in Minneapolis thanks to RCV and believe that the choice RCV affords to voters ensures strong representation of issues they care about.

Sincerely,

Jacob Frey
Minneapolis Mayor



May 1, 2019 (Resubmitted 3/3/20)

Dear Minnesota Legislators,

We are writing to urge you to support the Ranked Choice Voting Local Options bill that is advancing at the legislature this session. The bill seeks to grant to statutory jurisdictions (cities, townships, school districts and counties) the same authority home-rule cities currently have to adopt Ranked Choice Voting if they so wish.

Minnesota is home to a robust and diverse group of employers, large and small, including 19 Fortune 500 companies. While we differ in size, we share one thing in common: the need for stability and predictability in our economic and political environment. Our planning horizons tend to be longer term and so we require certainty in order to make investments and deliver the growth our shareholders and owners expect.

As business leaders, we view the growing political polarization in our state and nation with alarm because it impedes the kind of genuine, hammered-out bipartisan legislation that drives business certainty. We see both sides of the aisle veering toward extremes – and an electoral system that encourages this dynamic. Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter and Katherine Gehl, former CEO of Gehl Foods describe this problem well in their [study](#) of the impact of political dysfunction on the health of our economy.

The business community in Minnesota has significant challenges that we must address to ensure the longer-term prosperity of our state – health care, education, infrastructure, immigration, taxes, community safety, to name a few. These issues are of critical importance to us because they support our state's ability to conduct business and attract and retain employees in our home towns. They are also important to businesses looking to expand or relocate to our state. We need our elected officials to work together in good faith to address these issues with bipartisan legislation that can stand the test of time. Our business community depends on it.

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is a simple, common sense way to encourage political candidates to appeal to a broader swath of their constituency. Voters ranked their preferences, 1, 2, 3, etc. If no candidate wins a majority of first choices, then another round of counting occurs. The least favorite candidate is eliminated and the votes cast for that candidate are reassigned to the remaining candidates based on the second choices on those ballots. This process continues until one candidate receives a majority of continuing ballots. It works like a runoff but in a single, cost-effective election. [See RCV overview here.](#)

When candidates must appeal to voters for second choices and seek the votes of more people in their district, it changes the tone and tenor of political campaigns, focusing them more on the issues

and less on attacking their opponents. It also drives greater engagement and turnout from voters who have become disillusioned with the current political system.

RCV is not a new, confusing or radical practice. It has been in use for more than 100 years and is used around the world in democracies such as Australia, Ireland, Scotland and New Zealand. In the United States, it's used or pending use in nearly 20 jurisdictions, including Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina for military and other voters overseas, the state of Maine and cities like Santa Fe, Memphis, San Francisco, San Leandro, among others.

We have watched the use of Ranked Choice Voting in Minneapolis, St. Paul and St. Louis Park and concluded that it has been successful, efficient and effective. Studies show that voters find RCV simple to use and they prefer it over the current plurality system. Elections are more competitive, voter turnout is higher, campaigns are more civil and winning candidates take office with a majority of voter support. In local nonpartisan elections which this bill refers to, RCV eliminates the need for separate primary elections, saving taxpayers and candidates the cost of an election.

The RCV Local Options Bill (HF 983), is a simple first step towards this better approach. It gives all Minnesota communities the ability to explore and decide for themselves if this system is right for them. Local control is a core principle in our state. We urge you to adopt this bill and allow Minnesota communities to be able to choose this electoral reform if they see fit.

Sincerely,

Marc Gorelick
Penny Wheeler
Bill & Penny George
Karla Ekdahl & Peter Hutchinson
Jay & Page Cowles
Jeanne Craine
Kelly Doran
Matt Furman
Jim Leslie
Leo Lopez
David Mortenson
Dave MacLellan
Richard & Joyce McFarland
Marilyn Carlson Nelson
Wendy Nelson
Kim Nelson
Ken Powell & Wendy Bennett
Mike & Elizabeth Sweeney
Mark Traynor
Jonathan Weinhagen

February 25, 2020

Re: Support for HF983, Ranked Choice Voting Local Options Bill

Members of the House Government Operations Committee:

At the January 28th, 2019 meeting of the Red Wing City Council, our council unanimously passed a resolution supporting legislation that would create state standards for units of government that wanted to implement ranked choice voting (RCV). That bill was HF 983. I want to ask you to continue to support this bill.

This local options bill only establishes procedures for implementing RCV in those cities that choose to adopt this voting method, and allows for statutory cities, counties, townships and school districts to make that choice as well. Ranked choice voting has been upheld by the state Supreme Court by both facial and as applied challenges. Polls of the cities that have adopted RCV find that residents are overwhelmingly in support of this method of voting, and find it easy to use.

We in Red Wing have seen first hand how the lack of state standards has hindered our local conversation. Just this past fall the Red Wing City Council voted to start a referendum process to change our city charter to make municipal elections by RCV. Before making this move we consulted staff at the MN Secretary of State's office and were told that RCV was feasible for a city like ours that conducts even year elections. Our council voted to move ahead with a first reading by a 6 to 1 vote. Based on further research by our city attorney and conversations with Goodhue County elections staff, we conducted a follow up conversation with the MNSOS office and were told at that time that RCV races can not meet the ballot restrictions of even year elections.

This lack of clarity for RCV elections needs to be addressed. It makes sense for the state to create standards around this voting method instead of leaving it to be implemented individually by cities, so that all levels of government are operating from the same understanding. It makes sense to include statutory cities and other units of government. Creating a state standard for RCV elections creates a sense of continuity in election law and implementation whether a unit of government implements RCV or not.

We want our local conversation to be about the method of voting, and what our residents want, instead of ancillary issues of whether we can design the right ballot or have to rearrange the year of our local elections. These concerns create a barrier for smaller cities such as Red Wing to even consider adopting ranked choice voting.

RCV has cleared legal challenges, has been chosen by citizens in the cities where it has been implemented, and surveys show that residents want to keep it. It widens voter choice and improves the tone of campaigns. In other words, it is a real method of conducting local elections in the state, is proven and popular and, as such, should have state standards for implementation just like first past the gate elections.

HF 983 is not a partisan bill. Our non partisan city council unanimously adopted support for this bill

because we have heard from residents through a variety of sources that they care about local elections and how to make them better. I hope you will pass this bill out of the House Government Operations Committee, with bipartisan support, and reach out to your colleagues in the Senate to support the companion bill, SF2424.

The Red Wing City council has voiced its strong support for this local options bill. I believe in this bill and would like our city to have a real conversation about our choice of voting method, so that our residents can choose what is right for them. I hope you will see the importance of creating a state wide standard for RCV and support HF 983.

Respectfully,

Evan Brown | Wards 3 & 4

Red Wing City Council

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I am writing this letter in support of the Local Options bill, House File 983.

Local control in our city and county elections is essential. With ranked choice voting (RCV) at the local level, many candidates experience their best opportunity to hear what is going on in peoples' lives and voters experience the satisfaction of feeling like their voices have been heard. We can increase the number and diversity in candidates giving people more of a choice.

Cities across our state vote in different ways and RCV is a legitimate and viable option for them. Having the RCV process defined in the statute would help advise communities that want to move forward with RCV. Statutory cities will also be provided with the opportunity to explore using this electoral reform to eliminates the cost of low-turnout primaries and provide a way to gauge majority support when more that two people are running for a seat.

As more and more cities are exploring the benefits of RCV for their communities, it is essential to provide uniform guidance for implementation. This bill will help provide counties with information and tools that they need to support and work with cities that choose RCV.

Thank you,
Beth Olson
St. Louis county commissioner District 3

ROCHESTER

Minnesota

Office of the City Clerk

Anissa N. Hollingshead, City Clerk

My name is Anissa Hollingshead, and I am the City Clerk and Communications Director with the City of Rochester. As the City's chief election official, thank you for the opportunity to share with the committee the importance of this bill for our state's voters.

Prior to joining the City of Rochester two years ago, I was with the City of Minneapolis for 10 years, where most recently I served as the Communications and Outreach Manager in the City Clerk's Office. I was with Minneapolis when ranked-choice voting was first implemented in 2009 and in 2013, I led the development of the City's first voter education program. In that role, I had the privilege of speaking directly with thousands of potential voters about the electoral process and learning about their concerns and potential barriers to voting.

Whether to use RCV is a decision well suited to local communities. As an election administrator, my role is to ensure we are implementing the will of the community as effectively as possible. HF 983 would provide a helpful combination of a common framework with some needed local flexibility to implement ranked-choice voting.

Rochester residents have been considering the adoption of ranked-choice voting, a decision within their realm currently as a charter city. Our Charter Commission has given some consideration to the switch, and at this point it is a decision that sits with our residents with efforts underway to bring forward a ballot question for a charter amendment. My involvement to this stage has been limited to providing neutral information and facts around election administration in a potential implementation.

The primary concern I have raised to date is the challenge presented in implementing RCV in even-year elections with state and federal contests on the ballot as well. My number one focus is always on the voter, and how the voting experience can be as straight forward and easy as possible. No Minnesota community currently uses RCV in even year elections, at least in part because of the challenges present in existing law.

HF 983 encompasses several elements that can help jurisdictions choosing to implement RCV do so in a way that is as voter-friendly as possible. The consistent standards that are included in the legislation are based upon the experiences of cities already using RCV in the state, and allow other jurisdictions to take advantage of best practices that have been identified. That consistency makes things simpler for voters, helps aid in common education efforts, and makes it easier to develop and approve equipment for use across the state for RCV.

In Rochester, the specific language allowing flexibility in ballot order is very significant to enabling a successful RCV implementation if that is the desire of our voters and representatives. As was once again evidenced in the 2018 elections across the country, ballot design plays a major role in voter experience. The example of Broward County and the substantial number of undervotes attributed to poor ballot design is just one example of this. Existing state law prescribing a specific ballot order would require a tortured ballot design that would place local contests using RCV in the middle of other races using the first past the post voting methodology. The shift to that requirement allowed under HF 983 is small but substantial in allowing a much more voter friendly ballot design. Without this change, I cannot as an election administrator support ranked-choice voting in even year elections.

Ranked-choice voting is a voting methodology growing in prevalence across both this state and the nation. Minnesotans would be well served by thoughtful action by the legislature to establish an appropriate balance of common parameters and local flexibility to enable the option to successfully enact RCV in a range of communities across the state.

Resubmitted 3/3/20
Current Bloomington City Councilmember

February 20, 2019
To the House Subcommittee on Elections
Letter in Support of HF 983, Local Option for Ranked Choice Voting

Dear Chair Dehn and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a letter of testimony on behalf of the Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) Local Options Bill. As a civically engaged resident and current candidate for the 2019 Bloomington City Council At-Large seat, I urge you to support the passage of this bill.

There are several reasons to support RCV across our state. First, it allows for more inclusive and fair outcomes in elections. In Bloomington, like many other communities, we have very low voter turnout in primary elections. Passage of this bill would allow our community and others to more easily move to general elections that result in outcomes that are more reflective of what the majority of voters want.

In addition, there are many communities and school boards that are not currently able to implement RCV even if they wanted to. In Bloomington's school board election, we have repeatedly seen vote splitting result in candidates being elected who do not have the majority of the votes or represent the majority of voters. RCV would prevent this from happening and result in a more democratic outcome.

RCV also encourages positive campaigning that is focused on the issues rather than the politics since candidates need to appeal to a broader set of voters. It encourages more diverse perspectives and opinions in debates while improving civic discourse. In a time of increasing polarization, divisiveness and negativity, we need this more now than ever.

At all levels of government, we need to do everything we can to restore the people's faith that their vote matters. We need to do everything we can to increase voter participation in our government. By giving people more choices through structural changes to repair our voting systems we can do just that. I urge you again to vote in support of the Ranked Choice Voting Local Options Bill.

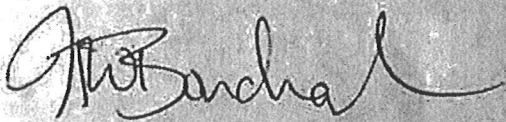
Thank you,

Jenna Carter, MPH
Bloomington City Council Candidate
612-701-0321

Chair Rep. Mike Freiberg and the Government Operations Committee of the Minnesota House of Representatives,

I am writing to express my support for the RCV Local Options Bill HF 983. I am a proponent of local control for school boards, cities, and municipalities. Those of us who are elected to represent our communities at this level are in the best position to make decisions about how our local elections are run, and we should have the option to implement RCV (without having to ask permission from the Legislature) if we so choose. I appreciate that the RCV local options bill contains no mandates; rather it provides local governments with the tools we would need to consider and implement RCV if we determine it is best for our communities. Please support this timely and important bill.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jen Bouchard".

Jen Bouchard

Chair, Hopkins School Board