

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.