

**Testimony of Jason Snead**  
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**Senate Bill 137**  
**Ohio Senate General Government Committee**  
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Thank you for the opportunity to return to my home state and testify today on Senate Bill 137, a measure to generally prohibit the use of ranked-choice voting (RCV). My name is Jason Snead, executive director of the Honest Elections Project, a nonprofit group founded on the principle that every American has the right to vote in free, fair, and secure elections. I also serve as the co-chair of the Stop RCV coalition, a nationwide network of policy and advocacy groups devoted to halting the spread of ranked-choice voting.

To be blunt, RCV is a complicated scheme that makes voting harder and puts public confidence in elections in jeopardy. I applaud the authors of this measure and the members of this committee for recognizing the inherent dangers of ranked-choice voting and proactively taking steps to safeguard Ohio elections against it.

To understand why RCV is so corrosive to public trust in elections, consider how a ranked-choice election works. Though RCV has many names—“Final Five,” “Instant-runoff,” and more—it is a scheme with a common goal: to do away with the American tradition of “one person, one vote,” and instead to ask voters to rank numerous candidates for each office by order of preference. RCV computes winners through a series of elimination rounds. If no candidate wins a majority of the first-place vote, the candidate with the least first-place votes is eliminated and ballots cast for them are redistributed to each voter’s next highest pick. This process repeats until a single candidate claims a majority of the remaining votes.

RCV makes every stage of the voting process more complicated, so much so that enormous effort must be put into reeducating the public. [New York City](#) spent \$15 million to teach people how to vote in an RCV election, while [Maine](#) was forced to produce a 19-page guide for voters.

All of this takes more time than voters are accustomed to. First, voters must study the platforms of numerous candidates for each office, including many who are fringe or otherwise unelectable. Then they must decide which candidates to rank, and the order in which to rank them, for every RCV race on a ballot. One [MIT](#) study found that filling out a ballot takes 12 seconds longer per candidate compared to typical plurality elections. In a “Final Five”-style system, RCV adds a full minute per race. In other words, if RCV advocates succeed in replacing federal, state, and local elections with ranked-choice voting, the time it takes to vote could easily double, risking long lines, voter fatigue in down-ballot races, and potentially deterring people from voting altogether.

Tabulating votes is also a challenge. With RCV, tabulation cannot begin until every ballot is received. In states like Ohio, which permit mail votes to arrive after Election Day, delays are inevitable. Alaska was forced to wait 15 days to report results due to its ballot receipt deadline; Arlington County, Virginia waited until the Friday after Election Day for the same reason.

Recounts only compound the issue. Candidates looking for any edge may demand recounts of close elimination rounds knowing that changing the order in which candidates are eliminated can upend the final results of the election. In other words, RCV increases the likelihood of post-election challenges, recounts, and litigation.

Because of the complexity of RCV, it is possible that tabulation mistakes can go undetected. In fact, Oakland, California experienced this firsthand in 2022. Tabulators mistakenly eliminated hundreds of votes and certified the wrong [winner](#) in a school board contest. Were it not for an outside audit by RCV experts, that error would likely have gone undetected.

Another significant issue is the problem of so-called “exhausted” ballots, that is, if voters do not rank every available candidate, and if their choices are eliminated before a final winner is computed, their ballots are eliminated as well. With each round of elimination, it appears as though fewer people voted. For example, roughly 140,000 ballots were exhausted in New York City’s mayoral race in 2021, for example, while 11,000 ballots were exhausted in Alaska’s 2022 special congressional election.

Eliminating exhausted ballots is the only way RCV can deliver on its signature promise to ensure that candidates win with majority support. But with RCV, this “majority” is merely a mirage, manufactured by eliminating ballots and redistributing votes. Again, consider the Alaska special election: If the 11,000 exhausted ballots are added back to the vote totals, Congresswoman Mary Peltola’s margin shrinks from a 51.5% majority to a 48.4% plurality.

The problems with RCV’s majoritarian mirage run even deeper. A first-place vote clearly does not signal the same level of support for a candidate as a third-place vote. The latter may signify indifference, opposition—or perhaps nothing at all, if the mark was made randomly by an exhausted voter ranking his 50<sup>th</sup> candidate of the day. Yet RCV [treats](#) every ranking as a vote for a candidate, and manufacturers majorities based on second- and third-place votes.

This is hardly the only area where RCV has fallen short of its promise. A 2023 [study](#) by the Hubert Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota concluded that ranked-choice voting failed to reduce political polarization, increase diversity among election officials, increase voter turnout, or decrease negative campaigning. In fact, one [study](#) of RCV in Maine found that “negative spending increased significantly...casting doubt on the claim that RCV makes campaigns more civil.”

With these deficiencies in mind, it is hardly surprising that so many jurisdictions have tried ranked-choice voting only to repeal it shortly thereafter. Proponents tout a Utah RCV pilot program that recruited two-dozen participants, yet over half of the original participants have [withdrawn](#) citing public confusion and RCV’s failure to deliver on its promises. [Polling](#) suggests a clear majority of Alaskans wish to repeal RCV, and such an effort is presently underway.

Much of the opposition to RCV is bipartisan, just like the measure we are testifying on today. In Washington, D.C., the District’s Democratic Party is suing to stop a ballot measure. Other prominent liberal elected officials and civil rights organizations have expressed grave concerns, including:

- “Ranked choice voting is overly complicated and confusing. I believe it deprives voters of genuinely informed choice.” Jerry Brown, former Governor of California
- “Where it has been implemented, I am concerned that it has often led to voter confusion, and that the promise that ranked choice voting leads to greater democracy is not necessarily fulfilled.” Gavin Newsom, Governor of California
- “[Ranked choice voting] would make our system more confusing, error-prone, and exclusionary.” Steve Sisolak, Governor of Nevada
- “Ranked choice voting is not beneficial to minorities. It’s voter suppression...I hope that the courts see that ranked choice voting is not right for democracy.” Hazel Dukes, Past President of the NAACP

One final point bears mentioning: today’s push for ranked-choice voting is not an organic, bottom-up movement led by local activists. It is a clear, concerted, national effort by a small group of elite liberal megadonors to remake elections across the nation. They are funding local advocacy groups, hiring lobbyists, facilitating media coverage, and spending tens of millions on ballot measure campaigns. In fact, as we speak the Wisconsin Senate is hearing testimony on a measure—backed by these same special interests—to bring RCV and California-style jungle primaries to their state.

Americans want elections with clear rules that deliver clear winners. RCV offers neither. Ranked-choice voting makes voting harder and turns elections into a complicated black box. RCV simply puts public confidence in elections at risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.