



**House File 89 (Elkins)**  
**March 17, 2021**

Dear Members of the House Local Government Division,

The Minnesota Chamber, representing more than 6,300 businesses of all types and sizes and more than half a million employees, appreciates the opportunity to provide our perspective on House File 89. The Chamber works tirelessly to advance a business climate that allows for innovation and forward-thinking leadership to strengthen Minnesota's economy for generations to come.

Respectfully, the Minnesota Chamber opposes House File 89, which establishes Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) for the election of candidates for federal office, state constitutional office, and the Legislature.

While RCV is promoted as a means to reduce polarization, increase participation, and lower costs, experience and academic research raises questions about its impact and can lead to other conclusions.

We believe Minnesota should maintain the current method of voting for legislative, congressional and statewide elections and encourage lawmakers to consider the following:

**Voter Participation.** A 2016 University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) study, which examined Minneapolis' experience with RCV, found RCV did not increase participation in general elections.<sup>1</sup> The study found "voter participation seems to be influenced more by the stimulus of a competitive local or statewide campaign rather than by the adoption of RCV rules."

In fact, researchers suggest that asking voters to "[rank] preferences beyond the most favored alternative can be a cognitively laborious task for voters who often seek to minimize the time and effort needed to make political decisions."<sup>2</sup>

**Voting Power & Ballot Exhaustion.** RCV presents voters who have just one preference in a race with a potential dilemma: either vote for a candidate whom the voter does not know or support, or risk having their voting power diminished over the course of multiple rounds of vote tabulation.

This results in "ballot exhaustion," which happens when a voter does not use all possible preference selections made available by RCV. Ballot exhaustion is common in RCV jurisdictions. A study of over 600,000 ballots across four elections in RCV jurisdictions found: "a substantial number of voters either

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<sup>1</sup> Kimball & Anthony, "Voter Participation With Ranked Choice Voting In The United States," University of Missouri-St. Louis, October 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Burnett, Kogan, "Ballot (and voter) "exhaustion" under Instant Runoff Voting: An examination of four ranked-choice elections," Electoral Studies 37 (2015) 41-49.

cannot or choose not to rank multiple candidates, even when they have the ability to do so. Instead, many opt to cast a vote for their top choice, neglecting to rank anyone else.”<sup>3</sup>

The reality of ballot exhaustion amplifies existing concerns about voting disparities. A review of the 2017 Minneapolis municipal elections found a higher percentage of exhausted ballots in North Minneapolis Wards 4 and 5 than elsewhere in the city.<sup>4</sup>

**Spoiled Ballots & Turnout.** The USML study found the citywide spoiled ballot rate increased significantly after the adoption of RCV, from 1% in 2005 to 4% in 2013. This higher rate of citywide spoiled ballots held for the 2017 election.<sup>5</sup> Further, it noted that lower-income wards experienced slightly higher rates of spoiled ballots than medium and high-income wards post-RCV.

**Election Costs.** In 2018, research on election costs in RCV jurisdictions found: “monetary savings nor additional expenses can be directly attributed to the use of RCV at the municipal level.”<sup>6</sup> While not attributing the cause to RCV, it also noted that jurisdictions which utilize RCV spend “inordinately more” than cities that do not.

While these concerns are not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature, they outline serious and sometimes unresolvable issues with RCV. We agree with researchers who conclude RCV is not a cure-all for what ails democracy and a tiered preference system can create a barrier to full participation.

Again, we believe the current system of election should be maintained.

Sincerely,

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at pg. 3

<sup>4</sup> Tom Nehil,, “A deeper look at the ranked choices for mayor of Minneapolis,” MinnPost.com, 11/21/2017.

<sup>5</sup> Committee on Elections and Rules, “The 2017 Municipal Elections: An Analysis & Recommendations,” Minneapolis City Council, May 9, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Rhode, “The cost of ranked choice voting,” Medium.com, 7/27/2018.