



March 27, 2025

Testimony for the Senate State and Local Government Committee
Senator Kristin Roers, Chairman

Meeting location JW216

Dear Senator Roers and members,

My name is Matt Dean, and I am a policy fellow with the Center of the American Experiment North Dakota. [American Experiment North Dakota](#) is a 501(c)(3) organization that works to create and advocate for policies that make North Dakota a freer, more prosperous and better-governed state.

Thank you for this opportunity to address [House Bill 1297](#), which would prohibit the use of a ranked-choice voting (RCV) system to replace traditional Election Day voting in North Dakota. States across the country are fighting this well-funded national effort to impose this complicated system of voting. North Dakota is smart reject RCV by passing [HB1297](#).

RCV will just make things worse for voters already frustrated with changing rules and increasing mistrust in elections. Leading up to the 2024 election, fewer than half of Americans – 44% — [had](#) “a great deal” or “quite a bit” of confidence that the votes would be counted accurately. RCV makes ballots harder to cast, harder to count, and more susceptible to financial influence from groups outside North Dakota.

Ranked Choice Voting makes it harder to vote because you are asking constituents to research each person running and to rank them in order of increasing distrust and also try to avoid a ranking that may tip the scales in favor of a candidate they really don’t want. Many will not rank a candidate they think is unsuitable because they consider the ranking a vote (which it is).

Under RCV, so-called “exhausted votes” (those eliminated because of incomplete ballots) are not counted. Across a study of 96 RCV races, [fully 61% fail](#) to get a true majority due to ballot exhaustion. In 2018, Maine’s RCV inaugural election left 9,000 voters with uncounted ballots because of exhausted ballots. [There were](#) 126,139 valid votes cast in Maine’s Democratic primary. In the final round, only 117,250 ballots were counted. More than 6 percent of voters

tried to cast a ballot but had the same impact on the election as they would if they had just stayed home. They tried to vote but literally threw their votes away because it was too confusing.

In 2009, Minnesota implemented RCV in off-year municipal elections. Five cities have experimented with RCV. One of those, Minnetonka, saw a [campaign to throw it out](#) only three years after it was started. Ellen Cousins, chair of the “Yes to Repeal RCV” committee put it simply. “We want to repeal it because it’s a costly, confusing and complex system and we don’t want anyone to feel unwelcome in the voting booth,” Cousins said.

In the 2017 Minneapolis mayoral election, [Jacob Frey emerged](#) from the 16-candidate field after five rounds of counting. Voter turnout was only 43 percent despite two previous elections with RCV. The previous election in 2013 saw Betsy Hodges emerge from a **35-candidate race** in 33 rounds of balloting. Even then, she received only 48.95 percent of votes. Voters did not find out who won for days.

In Nevada, RCV was put before the voters in 2022 in a statewide ballot initiative very similar to Maine and Alaska. In that initiative, a handful of wealthy donors put up nearly 80% of the \$43.69/vote to narrowly pass the initiative (53% in favor, 47% against). As crazy as that may sound, consider that Nevada voters had to endure a [second cycle of campaigning](#) and spending (\$29 million in favor of RCV to \$3million against) but the measure failed to pass the necessary second ballot to become law. Despite the crush of lopsided spending, educated voters rejected RCV.

In 2023, Minnesota proposed a statewide RCV bill. The experiences of the municipal elections in Minnesota caused legislators to say no. Secretary of State Steve Simon, a former House member and supporter of RCV, had a word of caution for his fellow democrats in the legislature. “Minnesota is not yet ready for statewide ranked-choice voting,” [Simon said](#). “Leave aside whether it’s a good thing or a bad thing to do, I can tell you that it’s an extraordinarily complicated thing to do.”

I would like to thank Rep. Koppelman and the coauthors of [HB1297](#) for putting this bill forward and encourage members to look at the experiences in other states to see why this bill is necessary to protect the integrity of North Dakota elections and your constituents’ confidence in them.

Thank you Madam Chair and members.

The Center of the American Experiment is “North Dakota’s Think Tank.” For more than 30 years, the Center has been leading the way, first in Minnesota and now in North Dakota, in creating and advocating policies for a freer, more prosperous and better-governed state.

