EQUAL VOTE COALITION

Dear Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission,

Thank you for all the work you've put in, and for your careful consideration of the public's input. The Equal Vote Coalition is a non-partisan nonprofit working to upgrade the electoral process of public elections to improve democracy for all. This includes researching voting science, growing the coalition of democracy advocates, and supporting practical electoral reform efforts. We believe fixing vote-splitting is the single most effective reform available due to its many knock on effects – from mitigating the outsized influence of money to reducing the hyper-polarizing nature of today's politics.

We ask that you consider amending the charter to use STAR Voting for LA elections. STAR Voting is the best voting method available, whether the commission proceeds with single-member districts, proportional multi-member districts, or a hybrid approach – with a primary or without. We're happy to answer questions and provide support as subject matter experts in the electoral space.

Why STAR Voting?: With STAR Voting, voters rate each candidate from 0 to 5 stars. The two highest-scoring candidates are finalists and the finalist with the most votes wins. Using STAR Voting would resolve vote-splitting, elect majority preferred winners where possible, empower voters to give their full and honest opinion, level the playing field to empower disenfranchised voters, and yield results that are more representative of the community.

Why not just go with Ranked Choice Voting?: Our current system only works with 2 candidates in the race. RCV can also have spoilers when there are more than 2 viable candidates in a race because the system doesn't count many of the rankings voters put down. It's counterintuitive, but if your favorite doesn't win, your next choice is often ignored, even if it could have made a difference.

The 2022 Alaska election for US House was a prime example. The majority faction ran two candidates who split the vote, and even though they had a 60% majority between them, they lost (1). As you might expect, in the following 2024 election we saw gate-keeping of candidates, just like in the current system (2). Alaska's sideways outcomes and oversold claims triggered nationwide backlash, and RCV is now banned in 17 states. (3) Many STAR Voting advocates are former RCV supporters who switched after learning more.

RCV does get some things right. In the recent NYC Mayor race, voters enjoyed being able to show their preferences, and we saw positive campaigning with candidates cross endorsing each other (4).

By upgrading to STAR Voting you get the benefits of the expressive ballot, without the dealbreakers from RCV's opaque tabulation that can waste votes and disenfranchise voters. If the goal is to improve voter engagement, have competitive elections, and get representative results, we need a better voting method like STAR Voting.

Research supports STAR: Rating has long been the gold standard for measuring public opinion since it intuitively lets people show their level of support. Ratings are also much more user friendly than rankings. With STAR Voting, voters can score candidates they like equally which would void your ballot with RCV. This is the main reason voter error rates triple on average under RCV (5). Filling out your ballot honestly should never void your ballot.

In the peer reviewed literature, STAR Voting has been shown to be the best option for representative outcomes and resistance to strategic voting (6), as well as best in class for combatting polarization and toxic candidate incentives (7). Commissions and committees that review voting methods consistently recommend STAR Voting, including by the Portland Charter Reform commission committee on voting methods (8) and the Democratic Party of Oregon Election Integrity Caucus (9).

This is a once in a generation opportunity, and with all the effort that goes into adopting a new voting method, we feel it's important to get this right. Please consider amending the charter to use STAR Voting for the Los Angeles elections. We look forward to presenting on this topic further and to support the commission in any way we can.

Thank you so much for your consideration,

Arend Peter Castelein
Los Angeles Chapter Chair - Equal Vote Coalition

(1) RCV Changed Alaska: An animated walkthrough of the Alaska election
(2) "Ranked Choice May Die In Alaska" the Wall Street Journal
(3) Ballotpedia: Ranked Choice Voting
(4) "Mamdani and Lander Cross Endorse Each Other in NYC" the New York Times
(5) "Overvotes, overranks, and Skips: Mismarked and Rejected Votes in Ranked Choice Voting" Pettigrew and Radley. Forthcoming in Political Behavior.
(6) "STAR Voting, Equality of Voice, and Voter Satisfaction: Considerations for Voting Reform" Constitutional Political Economy (2023)
(7) Candidate Incentive Distributions: How voting methods shape electoral incentives, Arxiv (2023)
(8) https://www.equal.vote/q_and_a_pdx_charter_commission
(9) https://multdems.org/alternative-voting-methods-report/