



## **DC Women in Politics Ranked Choice Voting Position Paper**

DCWIP reviewed the current proposed DC Legislation for Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). RCV in multi winner districts is also known as the "single transferable vote". In this process, the ballot shall allow voters to rank candidates for each office in order of preference equal to the total number of candidates for each office; provided that if the voting system, vote tabulation or similar related equipment used by the District cannot feasibly accommodate choices equal to the number of candidates running for office, then the Board of Elections may limit the number of choices a voter may rank to no fewer than three (3).

DCWIP has concluded that the organization will not support the legislation for DC for the following reasons:

- (1) Empirical studies have not been completed to determine the potential disparate impact on minority, women, and senior voters;
- (2) Literature reviewed suggests that the RCV is overly complicated and confusing, depriving voters of genuinely informed choices;
- (3) RCV began in the early 2000's and current data does not show it improves the equality of representation for women and minorities;
- (4) Although proponents of RCV state RCV discourages negative campaigning, there is no evidence that has been shown that RCV actually accomplishes this; and
- (5) There is also no proof to support the claim that RCV is the gold standard for effectively ending gerrymandering.

DCWIP reviewed the following literature discussing Ranked Choice Voting:

- Pew Research survey found that 34% of Republican voters and 32.5% of Democrats couldn't even name their own party's nominee for Congress; now voters are expected to have five informed choices, in order of preference? FairVote, which supports ranked-choice, found that under RCV, the "...prevalence of ranking three candidates

was lowest among African-Americans, Hispanics, voters with less education and those whose first language was not English.”<sup>1</sup>

- Per the New York Daily News OptEd, “Seniors vote in higher proportions than others. However, in RCV jurisdictions with greater percentages of older voters, more ballot-marking errors occur. Improperly marked ballots are discarded likely to disproportionately disenfranchise senior voters.”<sup>2</sup>
- In October 2019, Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed a bill that would have allowed more California cities, counties and school districts to adopt RCV. “I am concerned that it has often led to voter confusion,” he said, “and that the promise that ranked-choice voting leads to greater democracy is not necessarily fulfilled.”<sup>3</sup>
- Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed the RCV bill, stating that “Ranked-choice voting is overly complicated and confusing. I believe it deprives voters of genuinely informed choice.”<sup>4</sup>
- As discussed by the Alaskan Policy Forum, “*The* inherent feature of ranked-choice voting is problematic because it demands that voters have a large amount of information about candidates’ differing views. The fact is that most Alaska voters, like most voters in any election, do not follow political races closely enough to meaningfully rank multiple candidates. Yet in order to avoid losing influence in a ranked-choice voting election, a voter must rank each and every candidate. A voter, even one without strong feelings for or against certain candidates, may feel pressured to rank them anyway based on little more than random chance. It is impossible to know exactly how many voters in ranked-choice elections feel this way since nothing can be inferred from how they filled out their ballots, but this phenomenon is likely common.”<sup>5</sup>
- In Maine, voter confusion was so pervasive that proponents of ranked-choice voting felt the need to publish a 19-page instruction manual to help voters navigate the process.<sup>6</sup>
- Data analyzed from a study done of Rank Choice Voting in 2019 by 'Fair Vote' into 54 electoral races in the Bay area of California showed that both white and black candidates decreased in electoral wins while Latinos and Asians showed very significant gains. The examination yielded the following results:

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<sup>1</sup> “What’s wrong with ranked-choice voting: Let us count the problems” By HERB W. STUPP, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | NOV 01, 2019; <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-whats-wrong-with-ranked-choice-voting-20191101-k7o2s57h5bfrxoorisjw4zrp2i>

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2020/05/27/five\\_facts\\_about\\_ranked-choice\\_voting\\_492804.html](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2020/05/27/five_facts_about_ranked-choice_voting_492804.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/Brown-vetoes-bill-to-broaden-ranked-choice-voting-9518031.php>

<sup>5</sup> <https://alaskapolicyforum.org/2020/10/failed-experiment-rcv/>; Voter Confusion and Information Deficits

<sup>6</sup> Voting in Maine’s Ranked Choice Election.” Town of Wiscasset. 2018. Accessed July 23, 2019. <https://www.wiscasset.org/uploads/originals/rankchoicevoting.pdf>.

*PRE RCV ELECTED:*

White----- 62%  
Black----- 18%  
Latino---- 7%  
Asian-----13%

*POST RCV ELECTED:*

White-----39%  
Black-----16%  
Latino----18%  
Asian-----24%

- The highest profile user of RCV is the Academy of Motion Picture and Arts and Sciences who uses RCV to nominate and select winners of the Academy Awards.

Research into their use shows:

- (A) Only 19 out of 350 acting trophies (Oscars) have been awarded to Black actors/actresses.
- (B) Only 32 Academy Awards have been awarded to people of color in the history of the Oscar's as of 2019. This number includes the 19 awards that went to black actors or actresses.
- (C) Only 5 Black people have won Oscar's for Best Actor or Actress. Only one Black woman, Halle Berry has won the Oscar for Best Actress. Since the Academy began using RCV only 1 Indian, one Assyrian, 1 Arab and one Latino (other people of color) have won Best Oscar Awards.
- (D) In 2020 with RCV the Oscar nominees were NEARLY ALL WHITE with only Cynthia Erivos being nominated for 2 awards for "Harriet Tubman" and she DID NOT WIN EITHER.
- (E) A 2012 analysis by the Los Angeles Times indicated that the 6,124 Academy members (those who nominate and vote) are overwhelmingly white (94%) and male (76%). Overall, since 2000 African Americans garnered 10% of acting nominations and 15% of the wins despite under representation of African Americans on screen. Studies suggest about 9% of the characters on screen have been Black. In 2019, no movies made by starring in or about African Americans received nominations for any of the major awards according to 'Fair Vote'.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT <http://www.dcwomeninpolitics.org>

Based on both the analytical data and empirical assessments reviewed and vetted by the Executive Committee of DC Women in Politics, we have determined that Rank Choice Voting (RCV) is not a legislative proposal that we can or would recommend or support for the District of Columbia.

Not only does our examination show that RCV may not benefit women and people of color in the electoral process, we also buttress our decision based on the most recent Census data (2017) available to us which shows that between 2000 and 2010, there has been a 31% jump in the non-Hispanic white population in DC while the black population of the city dropped by 11.5%. Those statically are likely even more disparate in 2021.

That data also reflected that 1 in 7 Washingtonians are immigrants with a large number of them NOT fluent in English. The combination of the challenges of dealing with those who are not fluent in English, as well as seniors who would have difficulty navigating the RCV process, this proposed legislation, whether intentional or not, would likely serve to disenfranchise a significant population of DC voters and thus harm electoral aspirations for both women and people of color.

Again, DC Women in Politics must go on record as opposing this proposed legislation and any efforts to adopt Rank Choice Voting as an electoral vehicle in the District of Columbia.

Please [click here to register your vote](#) in support of not adopting Ranked Choice Voting in DC.

## **ABOUT DC WOMEN IN POLITICS**

*DC Women in Politics is a diverse nonpartisan, nonprofit women's leadership organization. Our mission is to increase the number of women elected to public office and to monitor their legislative and advocacy actions on issues that impact women and families. For more information about DC Women in Politics visit [www.dcwomeninpolitics.org](http://www.dcwomeninpolitics.org), on Twitter [@dcwomen\\_politcs](#) and [DCWomenInPolitics on Facebook](#)*