

March 9, 2023

Dear Chair Carlson and members of the Senate Elections Committee,

As a nationally-recognized public health expert, I have had the opportunity to observe the successes and failures of our nation's response to numerous health crises, including the pandemic, and **what I discovered is that many of our public health failures arose from deficiencies in governance and our polarized political environment.** I witnessed the politicization of the pandemic first hand — and the devastation that had on our response.

Unfortunately, our current plurality election system, where politicians can win solely by securing the support of their base, is fueling division, misinformation and extremism in our politics. In order to respond effectively to the pandemic and the next health crisis, we must address the division and dysfunction plaguing our democracy.

I am on the board of FairVote Minnesota, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that advocates for Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), one of the top reforms to strengthen and protect our democracy. RCV allows voters to rank their preferred candidates, and the rankings are used to conduct an instant runoff to ensure elected officials earn broad majority support. It is a simple but powerful change to the ballot that encourages candidates to reach beyond their base and build broad coalitions of support, incentivizes positive campaigns based on the issues and elects leaders who are responsive to the concerns of the majority and incentivized to solve problems and get things done.

Leaders can have a tremendous impact on policy and how we respond to a public health crisis. To respond effectively, we need leaders that focus on the issues, speak the truth and unify the public for a common purpose, and we elect those kinds of leaders through RCV.

While no single reform can solve all the dysfunction in our government, RCV is a proven, common sense step we can take right now, and **Minnesota could be the first state to bring ranked-choice elections statewide through legislative action.** Alaska, which adopted RCV by referendum as Maine has done, has recently shown us the effective power of this reform to award positive campaigning and coalition building over extremism and polarization which is what our country needs now more than ever.

Five Minnesota cities – Bloomington, Minneapolis, Minnetonka, St. Louis Park, and St. Paul – already use RCV for their municipal elections, and Minnesota's experience with the electoral system demonstrates its many benefits. Voters consistently and overwhelmingly report that RCV is easy to use and fosters more civil campaigns. Not surprisingly, huge majorities also report that they like RCV and prefer it over the old system. Voter participation is higher under RCV by fostering more competitive elections with multiple candidates – a key driver of voter turnout. For more detail, see FairVote Minnesota's [RCV in Minnesota Cities Dashboard](#).

Over 60 jurisdictions across the country already use RCV, including the states of Maine and Alaska, and Nevada will adopt the system statewide if a ballot measure passes once more in 2024. Momentum for this reform continues to grow nationwide, and even more jurisdictions will be using ranked-choice elections in 2023. Minnesota is ready to be the next state to use RCV statewide, and the very first through the legislative process.

While I have been fortunate to experience significant success in my life, I view RCV as the legacy of my lifetime and a way to bring about a better world for my kids, my grandkids and their future. RCV is a simple change to the ballot but one that holds the promise of bringing about a more inclusive, representative and responsive democracy for all.

Sincerely,  
Michael Osterholm