

Testimony to the Committee on State and Local Government and Veterans

April 16, 2024, re S.F. 3868: Ranked Choice Voting Local Option

Chair Dziedzic and members of the Committee:

My name is Rod Adams. I am Founder and Executive Director of the New Justice Project, and I'm here to speak in support of HF 3276.

Our electoral system was designed to shut people out, and it was only with time and hard work that more and more people gained access to the ballot and a voice in who represents them.

There's no denying there's been progress, but just achieving access to the ballot isn't enough. Too often, Black communities and communities of color are asked to choose from candidates that don't represent us or our interests.

Ranked choice voting helps communities who have been traditionally marginalized by allowing more people who look like us to run, which in turn gives our communities more choices and chances for direct representation.

The positive impact of ranked choice voting on representation in elections has been demonstrated over and over again. Before RCV, Minneapolis and St. Paul had nearly all-white city councils. Since RCV, they have had the most diverse councils in their histories.

This is because RCV gets rid of the unrepresentative, low-turnout primaries, which has been a huge structural barrier for candidates of color. Under RCV, a multi-racial electorate turns up in a single higher turnout General Election, giving diverse candidates a much greater shot at winning. And, rather than split votes among candidates of color, RCV allows voters of color to pool their votes and increase the opportunity for their candidates to win.

In all the cities that use RCV, we've seen a lot of firsts -- 1st Somali, 1st Hmong, 1st Trans, 1st Latino, 1st all-female city councils in St Paul and Minnetonka, and more. In 2023 alone, more than half of winners were people of color, and more than 90% were women.

As someone who has worked on multiple campaigns and elections, I see these huge strides in building representation and political power as the way to a true multi-racial democracy. Let's give more communities the power to shape how they choose their representatives. Vote yes on the Local Voices, Local Choices Act.