



April 25th, 2022
Vermont Senate
155 State Street
Montpelier VT, 05602

Dear Senator,

We write to urge the Vermont Senate to approve H.744, Burlington's proposed ranked choice voting charter change.

If enacted, H.744 would give legislative approval to the City of Burlington to use ranked choice voting in all future City Council elections. Generally, it would allow Burlington voters to rank candidates in order of preference – as many or as few as they like. If their vote can't help their top choice win, their vote counts automatically for their next choice. The proposed charter change was supported by an overwhelming number of voters on Town Meeting Day in 2021. **In fact, over 64% of voters supported the proposal, on a vote of 8,914-4,918.**

Ranked choice voting will strengthen local government in Vermont's largest city. Most importantly, the reform ensures that winners enjoy the support of a true majority of voters. As it stands now, a City Councilor can win a three-race race with as little as 40% support – which could mean 60% of voters opposed them. With ranked choice voting, councilors must demonstrate they can garner support from not just their base, but from a majority of voters. This approach better reflects the will of the people and the spirit of democracy.

Furthermore, ranked choice voting will save Burlington residents from expensive runoff elections, while ensuring majority support for the winner. Runoff elections require all of the taxpayer costs and burdens of an additional election, but voter participation is usually much lower. Ranked choice voting essentially has a runoff election built into the system, which is only used if no candidate wins a majority of first choice votes.

In the 43 jurisdictions that used ranked choice voting in their most recent election, voters and candidates benefited from a host of other benefits too. These benefits include leveling the playing field, removing barriers for candidates, and bringing greater equity to our elections. Important research from FairVote and RepresentWomen has indicated ranked choice voting contests increase diversity in both candidates and winners.

Democracy is strongest when more voices are heard, but good candidates are often pressured to stay out of a race for fear of splitting the vote with a similar candidate. This can be particularly true for candidates from groups under-represented in elected office, including women and BIPOC individuals. Ranked choice voting allows more than two candidates to compete without fear of hurting one another's chances. In addition to this, ranked choice voting encourages less negative campaigning because candidates compete for voters' second-choice votes.

We thank you for considering this letter and urge you to pass H.744, to respect the will of Burlington voters and allow them to strengthen their local democracy.

Sincerely,

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