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Dear members of the Saint Paul Charter Commission,

I am Ellen Brown, former chair of the Saint Paul Better Ballot Campaign, a citizen-initiative to enact Ranked Choice Voting. RCV was adopted by the voters of Saint Paul in 2009 with 52.5 percent of the vote. As a board member of FairVote Minnesota, I assisted with the successful implementation of that measure and with our voter education program since its adoption.

Below I will layout the experience that Saint Paul has had with RCV since its adoption. But before doing that, let me point out that this experience is limited to only three council races as the other races were not competitive and ranked votes were not a factor. Most importantly to the proposal you are considering, however, is that Saint Paul voters have not yet used RCV in a competitive city-wide race as Mayor Coleman was never seriously challenged. **This upcoming mayoral election will be the first broad test of RCV in Saint Paul and it is seriously misguided to ask voters to do away with the system before it has been evaluated in a city-wide race.**

RCV in Minnesota

RCV has been used in municipal elections in Minnesota's two largest cities since 2009. Since that time, over 215,000 ranked choice ballots have been cast in the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul to determine winners in 54 municipal races.

Interest by municipalities in Ranked Choice Voting grew following an exhaustive study by the League of Women Voters of Minnesota in 2004 that evaluated various alternative voting systems and formally endorsed RCV (or Instant Runoff Voting as it was called then). Other important support comes from the Minnesota DFL, where it has been in the party's action agenda or ongoing platform since 2008, the Minnesota Independence Party, the Minnesota Green Party, five of the current seven Saint Paul city councilmembers, Governor Mark Dayton and Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith, former Senator Dave Durenberger and former mayors Jim Schiebel and George Latimer.

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RCV in Saint Paul

Saint Paul voters used Ranked Choice voting in city elections in 2011, 2013 and 2015, though only a few races were considered competitive. In each of these cycles, in all but one race, winners emerged on Election Night having won a majority of first choice rankings. In the one council race in each election that required multiple rounds of tabulation, reallocation was efficiently completed and fully transparent. In fact, in the highly competitive 2015 Ward 2 race, Saint Paul elections manager, Joe Mansky, noted that the election was the smoothest he'd ever seen.

Saint Paul's Hart InterCivic precinct-based voting machines are capable of reading and counting ranked ballots. Precinct results are submitted to the central counting location for tabulation at the ward or citywide level. The counting process is fully transparent, with round-by-round results of all ballot rankings publicly displayed in a user-friendly format. The process is neither burdensome nor chaotic for election administrators, candidates, or voters. And by the next cycle, when fully automated reallocation software is anticipated to have been certified, the process will be even more efficient and faster.

RCV elections in Saint Paul

What follows is background information on the three competitive races to date in Saint Paul.

- **Ward 2, 2011(Incumbent race)**

  Total valid votes cast: 5,363
  Valid ballot rate: 99.99%

  Total first preferences for each candidate:
    - Dave Thune: 2,078 (39%)
    - Jim Ivey: 1,435 (27%)
    - Bill Hosko: 1,378 (25%)
    - Cynthia Schanno: 344 (6%)
    - Sharon Anderson: 120 (2%)
    - Write-in: 8 (<1%)

  Winner: Dave Thune, Round 3 with 58% of continuing ballots; 53% of initial ballots cast

- **Ward 1, 2013 (Special election)**

  Total valid votes cast: 4,770
  Valid ballot rate: 99.99%

  Total first preferences for each candidate
  - Dai Thao: 1,347 (28%)
  - Noel Nix: 1,167 (24.5%)
  - Johnny Howard: 728 (15%)
  - Debbie Montgomery: 682 (14%)
  - Paul Holmgren: 178 (4%)
  - Kazoua Kong-Thao: 396 (8%)
  - Mark Voerding: 265 (5.5%)
  - Write-in: 7 (<1%)

  Winner: Dai Thao, Round 6 with 77% of continuing ballots; 41% of initial ballots cast

- **Ward 2, 2015 (Open seat)**

  Total ward voters: 5,738
  Valid ballot rate: 99.99%

  Total first preferences for each candidate:
  - Rebecca Noecker: 2,391 (42%)
  - Darren Tobolt: 2,208 (38%)
  - Bill Hosko: 840 (15%)
  - Pat Fearing: 110 (2%)
  - Sharon Anderson: 94 (1%)
  - Michael C. Johnson: 76 (1%)
  - Write-in: 19 (<1%)

  Winner: Rebecca Noecker, Round 2 with 53% of continuing ballots; 49% of initial ballots cast.

Note that it is always the case that the winner will receive a majority of ballots cast in the final round. Ballots for voters who chose not to rank one of the final two candidates are "exhausted" before the final round. In some cases, this results in winners with less than half the initial votes cast. Contrary to opponents' claims that RCV does not always elect majority winners, it does. It is simply the case that some voters do not like either of the finalists and did not rank them. We

know from polling that this is not because of voter confusion, but because of voter preference. Voters are instructed to rank as far as they have a preference and in some cases, voters do not wish to rank all the way down the ballot. It would be similar to voters not turning out for a run-off election of the top-two candidates because they didn't like either of them or skipping the general election if their preferred candidate lost in a primary.

More importantly, RCV increases *effective voter participation* by bringing together the most candidates with the most voters in one decisive election in November when turnout is highest and most diverse. This is especially key for communities of color who are are even more underrepresented in primaries than in general elections than the population at large. Under RCV more voters are choosing their local officials.

Costly, poorly attended and unrepresentative local primaries was a main reason voters opted for RCV in 2009. Here's the record in Saint Paul citywide, which shows that municipal primary turnout is a fraction of General Election turnout.

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009
Primary	35,883	18,550	31,668	16,928	37,994	19,226	25,303	5,606	11,672
General	63,915	43,690	61,362	76,326	59,864	32,652	59,509	30,620	34,411

RCV is proven to be successful in Saint Paul

Below are key findings from the exit polls and election results data in the competitive Ward 1 special election in 2013 and Ward 2 race in 2015. The polling was conducted by Edison Research. (See attached RCV By the Numbers for more detailed information.)

In contrast to claims of widespread voter confusion, the vast majority of voters knew about RCV before heading to the polls, ranked their ballots, found it simple to use, like it, and prefer to keep it over the old primary-general election system. Here are the highlights:

In 2013:
• 72% of voters found RCV simple to use
• 72% of voters ranked their ballots
• 62% of voters want to continue to use RCV

In 2015, the numbers were even higher:
• 83% of voters found RCV simple to use
• 73% of voters ranked their ballots
• 70% of voters like and want to continue using RCV in Saint Paul

Last, but not least, voters found the campaigns more civil. While in Ward 2 in 2015, outside groups engaged in negative campaigning, the campaigns themselves were more civil than under traditional head-to-head elections. In fact, negative mailers by outside groups in 2015 seemed to backfire and did not help their candidate win. Voters are tired of negative campaigning and are demonstrating a preference for civil and issue-based campaigns.

Regarding turnout, contrary to opponents' claims, RCV has led to increases in turnout on election day in the competitive races**. Let me stress that it is only relevant to look at turnout numbers in the wards in which RCV was a factor, not citywide. The first competitive citywide mayoral election since RCV adoption will not occur until this year.** In 2007, Ward 2 turnout was 22 percent. In the first RCV race in 2011, it was also 22 percent or essentially flat, which isn't surprising in a race with a strong incumbent. Those races tend to draw fewer people than open seats. In 2015, turnout was 25%, an increase over 2011 due to the competitiveness of the election and choice on the ballot. In Ward 1, turnout in the 2013 special election was 33% higher than in 2011, and the highest in 8 years.

Minneapolis is also experiencing higher voter turnout under RCV. This is a promising trend in an era of declining voter engagement. Let me note that advocates have not claimed that RCV would lead to increased turnout per se; but it does seem to be having a positive impact on overall voter turnout – in addition to increasing effective voter participation by eliminating the low-turnout primary and holding only one higher turnout election in November. In short, RCV is engaging more voters.

RCV in Minneapolis

Since there have only been three competitive races in Saint Paul since adoption of RCV, it may also be helpful to consider the success of RCV in our neighboring city, Minneapolis, with which we share a similarly large and ethnically diverse voting population and voting customs. Minneapolis voters approved a charter amendment in 2006 by a nearly two-to-one margin. RCV was first used in the November 2009 elections. The implementation was a tremendous success, with 95 percent of voters polled – and 97 percent of people of color polled – reporting that they found the ballot easy to use.

In 2013, RCV was used in the first open mayoral contest. It was a highly competitive election with 35 candidates. (Note, this unwieldy number of candidates was due to a very low [$20] filing fee that assured a place on the November ballot; the city of Minneapolis has since raised the fee to $500, as it is in Saint Paul). Voter turnout was the highest it had been in 12 years. Voters proved they understood the process, with a 99.94 valid ballot rate and nearly 90 percent ranking their ballot for mayor (it would have been higher had there not been a concerted effort

on the part of a campaign to urge voters in the Somali-dominant district, Ward 6, not to rank). See attached table showing ranking by precinct. Mayor Betsy Hodges won with 61 percent of the ballots cast in the final round and 49 percent of initial ballots cast – an incredibly large share given the large number of candidates. This reflects the high degree of ranking in that election as well as the fact that some voters prefer only one candidate and don't have a preference for any other candidate if that candidate is defeated. In the end, RCV ensured that the consensus candidate emerged as the winner and provided Minneapolis voters with the opportunity to express their true preferences about the candidates without worrying about vote splitting or the need for strategic voting. Attached are findings from the 2013 race in Minneapolis, including a breakdown of rankings by precinct.

Conclusion

I hope this information demonstrates the merits of RCV.

Beyond the case to be made for RCV on its own, I want to emphasize again how poorly timed a measure to repeal RCV in 2017 would be—before it has been tested in a competitive city-wide race and at the same voters will be using it to elect the city's next mayor. Such an action seems misguided at best.

Finally, when RCV was adopted in 2009, more than 7000 voters signed a petition verifying that they wanted the opportunity to consider and vote RCV up or down A majority (8 of 14) of the members of the Charter Commission, an unelected body, should not have the power to place on the ballot a question the voters haven't asked for. When voters put an initiative on the ballot, only they should have the power to decide if they want to reconsider it.

Respectfully,

Ellen Brown
Former Chair, Better Ballot Campaign