Date: February 27, 2025
Bill Number: SB6
Disposition: Opponent
Name: Richard Pund
Self

Chair Proctor and members of the committee,

My name is Richard Pund, I am a resident of Overland Park and I oppose SB6. I think the Legislature should take the opposite stance of this bill and explicitly allow Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in local elections. RCV is a proven way to solve many of the problems and inefficiencies that come with our plurality elections today.

Comparing RCV against the current process we use for our local elections, RCV is faster and more efficient. When used in nonpartisan elections, the instant runoff process allows governments to combine their primary and general elections into a single trip to the polls. Government Efficiency has become a popular buzzword this year so I am surprised the Legislature is looking at going the other way here.

By ensuring the winning candidate has a majority, RCV eliminates the spoiler effect. This means that voters can vote sincerely for a candidate that they support. Right now many voters are pressured to vote strategically, especially if they sincerely support an independent or third party candidate. I think that sincere voting is a very important benefit of RCV. Voting is a fundamental way for people to express themselves, so the strategic voting that is required by plurality severely limits our freedom of expression.

I've taken some time to understand the arguments against RCV and what proponents of this bill are saying. I'd like to point out two arguments that seem like double standards to me.

Proponents say they are concerned about the length of time it can take to tabulate an RCV election, alleging that voters would be left in the dark for weeks or months before any results are published. In reality, RCV elections with a clear winner can be called just as quickly as a plurality election. This is what's done in Maine already. Senator Susan Collins' re-election in 2020 was called by the <u>Associated Press</u> the day after the election when it was clear she had won a majority of first-choice votes.

When it comes to official election results, the canvass will be on the same day regardless of whether a city uses RCV or plurality. Just like plurality, it's necessary for all of the ballots to be processed before official results can be determined. When it is necessary for an RCV election to go past first-choice votes to find a winner, that process can be completed in a matter of seconds.

The other double standard I've noticed is related to exhausted ballots. Proponents of this bill claim that exhausted ballots in RCV elections are discarded or "thrown out". Again, the reality here is that once a ballot is exhausted, they are handled just like we treat undervotes today.

The images on the next page show the 2021 election results for Overland Park's Mayor. Imagine a voter who supported the candidate who finished fourth in the primary. When they voted in the general election, they may have chosen to leave their ballot blank rather than vote for either of the remaining candidates. This means their primary ballot would be a part of the candidate's vote totals in the primary, and would be an Undervote in the general. If a voter only ranks the last-place candidate in an RCV election, their ballot would be exhausted after the first elimination.

Note how the Johnson County official results do not include undervotes in their Total Votes Cast or Vote % fields. RCV follows this same precedent with its exhausted ballots. Are we throwing out ballots today? I don't think so. Are we going to ban plurality elections because of this practice? Again, I doubt it.

Overland Park Mayor
Vote For 1

	TOTAL	VOTE %
Mike Czinege	9,227	38.30%
Curt Skoog	5,644	23.43%
Faris Farassati	5,001	20.76%
Clay Norkey	4,219	17.51%
Total Votes Cast	**24,091**	**100.00%**
Overvotes	9	
Undervotes	52	
Contest Totals	24,152	

Johnson County 2021 Official Primary Election Results. 52 undervotes are not included in the total votes cast.
https://www.jocoelection.org/events-elections/august-3-2021-primary-election

Overland Park Mayor
Vote For 1

	TOTAL	VOTE %
Curt Skoog	20,243	50.76%
Mike Czinege	19,530	48.97%
Write-In Totals	107	0.27%
Total Votes Cast	**39,880**	**100.00%**
Overvotes	1	
Undervotes	328	
Contest Totals	40,209	

Johnson County 2021 Official General Election Results. 328 undervotes are not included in the total votes cast.
https://www.jocoelection.org/events-elections/november-2-2021-general-election

Finally, SB6 goes against the findings of the 2017 Special Committee on Elections. That committee determined that current law allows Home Rule governments to adopt RCV. Given that RCV has become more well-known and popular around the country in the time since that committee hearing, I have to question why the legislature is now interested in taking away local control on this. RCV is not an unknown quantity. If a city looks at RCV and determines that its benefits are worth the investment, I don't think the state should stand in their way.

Thanks for your time,
Richard Pund
Overland Park, KS