



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**December 11, 2019**

**Contact: Rep. Mark Spreitzer, 608-237-9145**

## **Rep. Mark Spreitzer and Sen. Mark Miller Introduce Ranked-choice Voting Bill**

MADISON- Today, State Representative Mark Spreitzer (D-Beloit) and State Senator Mark Miller (D-Monona) introduced a proposal to implement a new voting system, called ranked-choice voting (RCV), for most Wisconsin elections. Like most states, Wisconsin currently uses a plurality-winner election system where the candidate who receives the most votes wins, even when they do not have a majority.

“Ranked-choice voting is an innovative and practical way to make sure people can vote for who they truly want, rather than vote strategically for who they think has the best chance of winning,” Rep. Mark Spreitzer said. “Ranked-choice voting also ensures that those who serve in elected office are there because they have the support of a clear majority of voters.”

“Ranked-choice voting gives voters the best opportunity to elect representation with the broadest public support,” Sen. Mark Miller said.

In a ranked-choice voting system, voters rank candidates in order of preference (1 for favorite, 2 for second favorite, etc.). If a candidate wins an absolute majority (50% plus one vote) based on voters’ first-choice preferences, that candidate wins. However, if no candidate wins a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-choice preferences is eliminated, and their votes are reassigned to other candidates based on those voters’ next preference. This process repeats itself until a candidate receives a majority of the vote and is elected. This system is sometimes referred to as instant-runoff voting. Ranked-choice voting combines paper ballots designed to allow preferential ranking, computing power to count votes quickly, and the concept of a runoff election to produce an electoral system that ensures majority support for elected officials without the extra expense of an entirely separate runoff election. Implementing ranked-choice voting in Wisconsin would eliminate the need for the nonpartisan February primary, providing significant savings to the state and municipalities by eliminating the costs associated with administering that election.

Under Wisconsin’s current system, a candidate may win an election with far less than 50% of the vote. This scenario becomes more likely the more candidates enter a race. This problem commonly shows up in crowded party primaries and general elections with third-party candidates. Voters fear wasting their vote should they choose their favorite candidate, which could create a “spoiler” and help elect their least favorite candidate.

The same principles apply to elections with multiple winners, like city councils, school boards, and town and village boards. This RCV process, called single transferrable vote, uses the same ranking system to determine multiple winners when multiple seats are being elected.

Ranked-choice voting is not new. Many cities, like Minneapolis, already use it; Maine approved ranked-choice voting by referendum in 2016 and 2018; New York City voters approved ranked-choice voting by a 3-to-1 margin; and prominent corporations and organizations, such as the Academy Awards, use ranked-choice voting. The basic concept of using runoff elections to ensure that an elected position is filled by someone receiving majority support has been in use for hundreds of years and types of runoff elections are currently used in states like Texas, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Vermont.

In Utah, ranked-choice voting has been used by parties to nominate candidates for general elections, and the state is currently piloting ranked-choice voting in municipal elections. Former Utah Republican Party Chairman and leader of Utah Ranked Choice Voting, Stan Lockhart said, "Ranked-choice voting allows a voter to more fully express their will in an election. It produces many more benefits and fewer weaknesses than plurality-winner systems, and it guarantees that the winner was supported by a majority of voters. In Utah, we have used ranked-choice voting for party nominations for years, and we are now bringing its advantages to other elections. I hope that Wisconsinites will see the same benefits in ranked-choice voting."

This legislation is supported by FairVote, a nonpartisan champion of electoral reforms that give voters greater choice, a stronger voice, and a representative democracy that works for all Americans. FairVote's team helped ensure that this proposal builds on lessons learned from implementation of ranked-choice voting across the country.

"Wisconsin has seemed ready for this conversation for years, and I am excited to see comprehensive ranked-choice voting legislation proposed," said Rob Richie, President and CEO of FairVote. "Statewide elections in Wisconsin are often so close that third party and independent candidates can affect outcomes, and we have seen support for ranked-choice voting in multiple Wisconsin localities."

"Wisconsin has been a leader in voting rights and electoral systems in the United States, and implementing ranked-choice voting will give voters a better way to make their voices heard," Rep. Spreitzer said.

###

MEDIA NOTE: [Here is a 1 minute video](#) that helps explain rank choice voting.