



League of Women Voters® of Portland

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July 13, 2023

To: Mayor Wheeler, Commissioners Gonzalez, Mapps, Rubio, and Ryan

From: Carolyn Buppert, President, Debbie Aiona, Action Chair, and Janice Thompson, Action Vice Chair, League of Women Voters of Portland (LWVPDX)

Subject: Opposition to a possible ballot measure to reverse charter reforms

The League of Women Voters of Portland (LWVPDX) was alarmed to read in the July 12 *Oregonian* that Commissioners Gonzalez and Ryan are considering asking the Council to refer a ballot measure for a November Special Election, which would significantly change the reforms to Portland's city government and elections that Portland voters approved by nearly 60% in November 2022.

Our concerns were not eased by subsequent reporting in the July 12 *Portland Mercury* indicating that although there is "no official proposal or amendment in play" there is evidently still a plan for a council work session early next week. In contrast to the extensive, inclusive, and transparent discussion by the Charter Review Commission, City Hall conversations seem to be occurring behind closed doors in an inappropriately rushed fashion.

These media reports are especially disappointing since, up until now, we have been pleased by how smoothly the process approved by voters is being carried out by the City. We applaud the City Council for your approval of the new City Code for Ranked Choice Voting and your excellent appointments of members of the voter-required Independent Salary Commission and Independent Districting Commission, as well as the Government Transition Advisory Committee. These commissions and the committee are doing their jobs with laudable dedication and transparency. We also appreciate the transition staff team's hard work. Any policy or implementation changes made at this point would be disruptive and subvert the will of the voters.

The *Oregonian* article also reflected a misunderstanding of the reason for the 25% threshold for electing each of the three councilors in the new districts. Because of the 25% threshold, all voters in a district have more power to choose the three councilors who will represent them. This is because a portion of the surplus votes (above 25%) for elected candidates and votes for eliminated candidates can be counted for the voters' next highest choices. In addition, because each councilor will be elected with a different 25% of the vote, well over a majority of the voters (potentially 75% or more) will be represented by at least one of the councilors they chose.

The League of Women Voters of Portland:

To promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government.

Another clarification is that there is no difference in how ballots appear to voters between ranked choice voting for councilors elected on a multi-seat basis and for citywide mayor and auditor candidates. There is a difference in vote tabulation, but as was clearly put on the record at your April 12 hearing, both city and county election officials thoroughly understand the math behind the election code updates you adopted in an appropriate 5-0 vote.

The LWVPDX would strongly oppose a referral by the City Council that asks voters to overturn any part of the recent and decisive "yes" vote on comprehensive charter reform. Voter turnout last fall on Measure 26-228 was 67 percent while turnout on a November 2023 special election referral will be far lower. This is demonstrated by the much lower 35 percent turnout at the most recent November special election in 2019. Calling an unnecessary special election would be a waste of taxpayer money and a betrayal of the voters' will. We ask you to reject any consideration of a hastily developed 11th hour charter change referral.