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<i>City Manager</i> (707) 822-5953	<i>Police</i> 822-2428	<i>Recreation</i> 822-7091
<i>Community Development</i> 822-5955	<i>Finance</i> 822-5951	<i>Transportation</i> 822-3775
<i>Environmental Services</i> <i>Streets/Utilities</i> 822-5957	<i>Environmental Services</i> <i>Community Services</i> 822-8184	<i>Engineering</i> <i>& Building</i> 825-2128

June 27, 2019

The Honorable Marc Berman
Chair, Assembly Elections and Redistricting Committee
1020 N Street, Room 365
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT for Senate Bill 212 (Allen)

Dear Assemblymember Berman,

The City of Arcata supports SB 212 (Allen), which would give general law cities, general law counties, and school districts the ability to adopt two majority-winner voting methods: two-round runoff and ranked choice voting (RCV) for local elections.

Under current law, only charter cities and counties may use RCV for their local elections. This means that roughly 75 percent of California's cities and counties do not have the authority to use these methods. Several charter cities in California already use these systems of voting. Cities using two-round runoffs include Los Angeles, Seal Beach, Burbank, San Bernardino, Sacramento, San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and San Leandro.

General law cities, counties, and school boards can only hold plurality-winner elections in which the candidate with the most votes wins, even if the majority did not vote for that candidate. According to a California Common Cause report, between 2006 and 2014, 42 percent of winning candidates in single-seat city elections were elected with less than a majority when three or more candidates ran. Electing candidates without majority support can undermine voter confidence in elections and government.

In 2017, in order to elevate California's impact on Federal primary elections, Governor Jerry Brown signed a bill moving California's primary from June to March. For counties and cities that utilize a primary process this extends the election cycle by an additional four months. In some cases, this could extend political campaigns to almost two years. It also could create "lame duck" elected officials holding office for over nine months. SB 212 would allow counties the choice to move to a single election in November possibly reducing the cost and duration of potentially lengthy election processes and political campaigns.

Two-round runoffs and RCV are voting methods that require candidates to receive a majority vote to win. In a two-round runoff, if no candidate gets a majority in the first round, the top two candidates advance to a second election to see who gets the most votes. Alternatively, RCV can be used in both single-seat and multi-seat elections to ensure the outcome is representative of voters' preferences.

Under RCV, voters rank candidates in order of preference. If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, they win, just like any other election. If not, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who had picked that now-eliminated candidate will have their votes count for their number second-ranked choice. This way, every voter feels like their vote matters.

Exit polls of six jurisdictions that use RCV found on average 84 percent of voters report that they understood the system extremely, very or somewhat well. Similar to non-RCV elections, over 99 percent of RCV ballots are validly cast. SB 212 requires jurisdictions to educate voters about RCV and make them aware of the change before their first two RCV elections.

For these reasons, the City of Arcata supports SB 212 (Allen).

Sincerely,



Brett Watson
Mayor
Arcata, CA

cc:

Senator Mike McGuire, Senator.McGuire@senate.ca.gov & VIA FAX: (916) 651-4902
Congressman Jared Huffman, John.Driscoll@mail.house.gov
Assembly Member Jim Wood, VIA FAX: (707) 445-6607 & (916) 319-2102
Sara Sanders, League Regional Public Affairs Manager, sanders@cacities.org
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