



Office of the Mayor

CONSENT CALENDAR  
March 13, 2018

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council  
 From: Mayor Jesse Arreguín, and Councilmembers Sophie Hahn and Kate Harrison  
 Subject: Supporting FairVote California's Proposed Changes to Ranked Choice Voting Reporting

RECOMMENDATION

Send a Letter to the Alameda County Registrar of Voters asking them to implement FairVote California's proposal to process the redistribution of votes in ranked choice elections until only two candidates remain.

BACKGROUND

Berkeley, along with Oakland and San Leandro, are the three cities in Alameda County that currently have ranked choice voting. In this system, a candidate must reach a majority of the vote instead of a plurality. The candidate with the lowest amount of votes is eliminated, with those votes redistributed to the other candidates. This process is repeated until a candidate reaches above 50% of the vote. However, the process of the redistribution of votes is currently stopped once a candidate reaches above 50%, even if more than two candidates remain in the race.

Providing such information until only two candidates remain provides increased transparency on the ranked choice voting process and shows a clear representation of the size of the mandate the winning candidate has received. San Francisco, also utilizes ranked choice voting, and redistributes votes until only two candidates remain.

Both Oakland and San Leandro City Councils will be considering a similar request of the Alameda County Registrar of Voters.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None. The change is possible in the system with minimal reprogramming. San Francisco was not charge to implement this change.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

No impacts to the environment.

CONTACT PERSON

Mayor Jesse Arreguín 510-981-7100

Attachments:

- 1: Letter to the Alameda County Registrar of Voters
- 2: Handout from FairVote California on proposed changes

March 13, 2018

Dear Tim Dupuis,

Rank Choice Voting (RCV) has served an important role in eliminating the need for run-off elections, and has provided voters with more choices. Currently, the redistribution of votes ends once a candidate receives a majority of the votes, even if there are more than two candidates remaining. We believe that in the interest of transparency, it would be appropriate to continue the redistribution of votes until there are only two candidates left. Doing this will also help the candidate and the voters know the size of the mandate, creating a more democratic process.

Other jurisdictions that have RCV have implemented such a process. San Francisco is one of them, having done this in their 2016 election. FairVote California, which is spearheading a campaign to make these changes, has researched on how this would impact Berkeley. It discovered that in the 2016 Berkeley mayoral election, which had eight candidates, the winner would have received 60% of the vote after going through every round, instead of the 50.4% as reported when five candidates remained. RCV is a relatively new system in Berkeley, and we believe that by making this simple change, we can further improve this process.

Thank you for the work you are doing to ensure elections in Alameda County are as open, accessible, and transparent as possible. We hope you will work with us, FairVote California, and the other jurisdictions with RCV in Alameda County in making this a reality.

Sincerely,

Berkeley City Council



**FairVote California Proposed Change to  
Ranked Choice Voting Reporting for Alameda County**

Currently, the Registrar of Voters (“Registrar”) for the County of Alameda conducts elections on behalf of the Cities with Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). Those cities include Oakland, Berkeley, and San Leandro.

**FairVote California is seeking a change to require the Registrar to process the series of runoffs until two candidates remain in the final round in a RCV election, even if a majority is reached in an earlier round.** In San Francisco, the Department of Elections runs the ranked choice voting algorithm in all contests down to the strongest two candidates and reports on those results.<sup>1</sup> **This change in reporting of election results will provide voters and the public a greater sense of how the winning candidate fared among all voters and helps to clarify the election results.**

For example, in the 2016 Berkeley mayoral race, the Registrar reported the final tally while there were still five candidates in the race (Arreguin, Capitelli, Worthington, Gould, and Runningwolf).<sup>2</sup> If the Registrar narrowed the race to two by running a final round of counting (eliminating Worthington, Gould, and Runningwolf, and transferring the votes of those voters to their next preference among the final two) Arreguin would lead 60% to 40% instead of 50.04% to 34.01% as reported.<sup>3</sup>

Reporting RCV rounds until two candidates remain is a modern best practice. When voters in Maine moved to adopt RCV for statewide races, the measure explicitly advocated for RCV rounds to occur in this manner. The League of Women Voters of Maine explained to its voters that under RCV, “All ballots are then retabulated, with each ballot counting as one vote for each voter’s highest ranked candidate who has not been eliminated. This process is repeated until only two candidates remain”<sup>4</sup> (emphasis added).

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<sup>1</sup> San Francisco Department of Elections, *Ranked Choice Voting Results Table, District 9 Supervisor* (2016) available at [http://www.sfelections.org/results/20161108/data/20161110/d9/20161110\\_d9.html](http://www.sfelections.org/results/20161108/data/20161110/d9/20161110_d9.html).

<sup>2</sup> Alameda Registrar of Voters, *Ranked-Choice Voting Accumulated Results - Mayor of Berkeley* (2016), available at [https://www.acgov.org/rov/rcv/results/230/rcvresults\\_6767.htm](https://www.acgov.org/rov/rcv/results/230/rcvresults_6767.htm).

<sup>3</sup> FairVote California, *Berkeley Mayor-Elect Jesse Arreguin Wins 60% to 40%* (2016) available at [http://www.fairvoteca.org/press\\_statement\\_berkeley\\_mayor\\_elect\\_jesse\\_arreguin\\_wins\\_60\\_to\\_40](http://www.fairvoteca.org/press_statement_berkeley_mayor_elect_jesse_arreguin_wins_60_to_40).

<sup>4</sup> League of Women Voters of Maine, *What is Ranked Choice Voting* (2016) available at [http://www.lwvme.org/files/RCV\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.lwvme.org/files/RCV_Fact_Sheet.pdf).

As a result of concern over voter clarity of RCV results,<sup>5</sup> San Francisco made the reporting switch as part of its November 2016 Election Plan. The plan stated that the department would release “[r]anked-choice reports for all ranked-choice voting contests, including those contests for which there are majority leaders, showing elimination of candidates until only two candidates remain.”<sup>6</sup> (emphasis added).

Further, greater transparency about the mandate of support of winning candidates is good for voters and the general public. Voters benefit by increasing their supported candidate’s margin of victory as it would eventually lead to preferred policy outcomes through the recruitment of candidates with preferable policy positions.<sup>7</sup> Further, when candidates are responsive to information in election results, voters affect policy both when they are pivotal in the election and when they are not.<sup>8</sup>

Although it has been the practice of the Alameda County Registrar when conducting ranked choice elections to have ballots counted in rounds that, in the case of a single-winner election, simulate a series of runoffs *until* one candidate receives a majority of votes, the candidate who receives a majority of votes **shall continue to be declared the winner by these jurisdictions**, and that provision shall remain unchanged. Finally, we understand that the capacity to run the rounds until two candidates remain is a feature built into the current voting system and that the change should incur no additional costs.

FairVote California seeks to have this change in place in time for the November 2018 elections. We are seeking support for this proposed change in reporting for RCV elections.

To sign on in support and for more information, email Pedro Hernandez, Deputy Director of FairVote California, at [pedro@fairvote.org](mailto:pedro@fairvote.org).

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<sup>5</sup> Memo from Chris Jerdonek, Vice President of the San Francisco Elections Commission, to the Elections Commission and John Arntz, Director of Elections, *November 4, 2014 Election Observations* (Dec. 15, 2014) (pg. 8), available at [http://sfgov.org/electionscommission/ftp/meetingarchive/www.sfgov2.org/Modules/2014-11\\_Election\\_Obs\\_Updated-documentid=2346.pdf](http://sfgov.org/electionscommission/ftp/meetingarchive/www.sfgov2.org/Modules/2014-11_Election_Obs_Updated-documentid=2346.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> City and County of San Francisco, Department of Elections, *Election Plan November 8, 2016, Consolidated General Election* (2016) (pg. 47) available at [http://sfgov.org/electionscommission/sites/default/files/Documents/election-plans/election-plan-2016-11-08/Election\\_Plan\\_Nov\\_8\\_2016.pdf](http://sfgov.org/electionscommission/sites/default/files/Documents/election-plans/election-plan-2016-11-08/Election_Plan_Nov_8_2016.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Faravelli, Marco, Man, and Walsh, *Mandate and paternalism: A theory of large elections*, *Games and Economic Behavior* 93 (2015) 1–23, pg. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Razin, Ronny, *Signaling and Election Motivations in a Voting Model with Common Values and Responsive Candidates*, *Econometrica*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Jul., 2003) pg. 1083-1119.

