



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA

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STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING **Nancy Bickel, Chair, Alameda County Council of the Leagues of Women Voters**

Senate Elections, Reapportionment and Constitutional Amendments Committee **Informational Hearing, October 25, 2005** **Instant Runoff and Ranked Choice Elections: Will They Lead to a Better Democracy?**

The League of Women Voters of California strongly supports Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) as a way to increase voter participation in elections and to save governments the cost of holding runoff elections. We believe it will contribute to strengthening our democracy. Since turnout for conventional runoff elections is usually much lower than turnout for general elections, winners of runoff elections may be elected by a much smaller number of voters than if they had been elected at a general election. IRV will enable more voters to help select their elected officials. This will, we believe, help citizens see that their participation matters and therefore will encourage more citizens to vote. Encouraging the broadest participation possible in our democracy is a key mission of the League of Women Voters.

The League supports election systems for executive offices, both at the state and local levels, which require the winner to receive a majority of the votes, as long as the majority is achieved using a voting method such as Instant Runoff Voting, rather than a second, separate runoff election.

As a consequence of this policy position, the League supports Senator Bowen's bill, SB 596. A copy of our letter of support is attached.

Local study of IRV makes support for IRV particularly strong in Alameda County. For example, the League of Women Voters of Berkeley, Albany and Emeryville studied and adopted a position in favor of IRV for their communities. In 2004, the LWVBAE campaigned vigorously, with others, to pass a local measure in support of IRV. As the cochair of the campaign, I am particularly proud to report that 72 percent of Berkeley voters passed Measure I for IRV in March 2004. Subsequently, members of this and other Alameda County Leagues have worked to overcome the many practical and legal barriers to make possible an IRV election in November 2006.

League members from throughout the county serve on Acting Registrar of Voters Elaine Ginnold's IRV Committee, which has drafted an IRV "roadmap" or model ordinance. This is but one element in the effort by our Leagues to implement Instant Runoff Voting at the local level as soon as possible.

Instant Runoff Voting has been an important part of the Oakland League's efforts over the past five years to elect rather than appoint candidates to interim vacancies on the City Council and the office of the Mayor and to expand the number of voters participating in these important Special Elections. Working with a multi-ethnic coalition of community groups to achieve electoral reform, members have demonstrated IRV in senior centers, political clubs and local churches. This public education and outreach effort provides a good model for future voter education on Instant Runoff Voting.

The League wants IRV to become a realistic option for elections in the three Alameda County cities that have already approved IRV in principle for some of their elections—Berkeley, Oakland, San Leandro—and in any other California communities that may wish to hold such elections in the future.

This will require a state standard for IRV. The Secretary of State's office needs criteria for evaluating proposed IRV election equipment and computer programs. When state standards and criteria are developed, vendors will be able to design and market appropriate equipment. Local governments will be able to consider IRV as a practical option. Citizens and local governments will adopt IRV as a reform that saves money and expands democracy.