

Erie County Charter Revision Commission
c/o Commission Chair, Shawn Connolly

March 13, 2025

Connor D. Whitney
148 Loring Avenue
Buffalo, NY 14208

One person, one vote—but what does that truly entail? Many voters today feel disillusioned with our current political system, often perceiving it as limiting and unresponsive to their true preferences. In most elections across the United States, voters typically select just one candidate, a method that can exacerbate voter frustration and discourage participation. Fortunately, there is an alternative: Ranked Choice Voting (RCV).

Ranked Choice Voting allows voters to rank candidates by preference—first choice, second choice, third choice, and beyond. If a candidate receives more than 50% of first-choice votes, they win outright. If no candidate achieves an initial majority, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and their votes transfer to voters' next preferences. This process continues until one candidate earns a majority.

RCV ensures each voter's voice matters, even if their top choice isn't initially successful. This system encourages candidates to run positive, inclusive campaigns, as they must appeal broadly to secure second and third-choice votes. Studies demonstrate that RCV increases voter turnout, promotes candidate diversity, and results in election outcomes more reflective of voter preferences. Jurisdictions including New York City have already successfully adopted RCV.

To the Erie County Charter Revision Commission: proposing Ranked Choice Voting for both primary and general elections for County Executive, County Clerk, County Comptroller, County Sheriff, all County Legislators, and District Attorney can meaningfully address voter disillusionment, enhance democratic participation, and ensure elections truly reflect the will of our community. I urge you to propose Ranked Choice Voting in your recommendations to the Legislature and lead Erie County toward a stronger, more representative democracy.

Ranked Choice Voting for Certain Elections in Erie County

a. Definitions

For the purposes of this section, the following terms are defined as follows:

- **Rank:** The number assigned to a candidate on a ballot to indicate voter preference.
- **Ranked choice election:** Any primary election for a ranked choice office or any election where all candidates are nominated by independent nominating petition.
- **Ranked choice office:** The offices of county executive, county comptroller, sheriff, district attorney, and county legislator.
- **Ranked choice voting:** A voting method where voters rank candidates in order of preference, and tabulation proceeds in rounds, eliminating the candidate with the fewest votes until one candidate has a majority.

b. Applicability

Ranked choice voting shall apply to primary and general elections for the offices of County Executive, County Comptroller, Sheriff, County Legislators, and County Clerk in Erie County. No run-off election shall be held for any ranked choice office.

c. Election Procedures

Ranked choice elections shall be conducted in accordance with applicable election laws, except as modified by this section:

1. In cases where a plurality is required for election, this shall be understood to mean election by ranked choice voting.
2. Any provision requiring a run-off election shall not apply to ranked choice elections.
3. Ballots shall be designed to allow voters to rank up to five candidates, unless fewer candidates are on the ballot.
4. The ballot shall be structured as a grid, with candidates listed in rows and ranking columns labeled numerically.
5. Clear instructions shall be provided on the ballot to guide voters on ranking preferences.

d. Tabulation Procedures

1. If a candidate receives a majority of highest-rank votes, they shall be declared elected.
2. If no candidate receives a majority, tabulation shall proceed in rounds:

- Each continuing ballot shall be counted for its highest-ranked continuing candidate.
 - The candidate with the fewest votes shall be eliminated.
 - This process repeats until one candidate has a majority.
3. In the event of a tie, the tie shall be resolved in accordance with election law.

e. Public Disclosure of Results

1. Unofficial election results shall include either the total number of first-choice votes for each candidate or the results of each round of tabulation.
2. Final results shall display votes for each candidate at every stage of tabulation.

f. Hand Counting Rules

1. Hand-counted ballots in ranked choice elections shall be tabulated using the same process as machine-counted ballots.
2. The Erie County Board of Elections shall establish procedures for hand-counting ranked choice ballots.

g. Voter Education

The Erie County Board of Elections shall conduct a voter education campaign to inform voters about ranked choice voting.

h. Implementation

1. The Erie County Board of Elections shall take all necessary steps to ensure the timely implementation of ranked choice voting.
2. A report detailing the implementation plan shall be submitted to the Erie County Executive and Legislature.