

2. Background Information

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a leading voice in advocacy for more representative voting methods. For more than a decade, we have been providing education and advocacy in support of single-winner Ranked Choice Voting to ensure that the individuals elected in single-winner races are supported by the majority of voters they are to represent. We recognize that our work on this front is not yet complete, and we continue to advocate for full implementation of single-winner Ranked Choice Voting where appropriate. [See the LWVME position on single-winner RCV.](#)

We have current positions that support both majority rule and minority representation as fundamental to representative democracy. Accomplishing both should mean that legislative bodies are approximately reflective of the composition of the electorate, i.e. proportional representation. With these goals in mind, single-winner Ranked Choice Voting is not well suited to the election of multi-seat bodies, such as legislatures, school boards, town and city councils and select boards. [Read about our current position here.](#)

In early 2022, the LWVME Advocacy Committee received Board support to launch a League study of Proportional Ranked Choice Voting (pRCV) for municipal and state legislative bodies. At that time, several threads had converged in our developing support for this approach:

- a. At the 2020 National Convention, LWVUS adopted a Voter Representation/Electoral Systems Position which includes support for Proportional Representation. In advance of that Convention, the LWVME board voted unanimous support for the concurrence position. See [LWVUS position statement.](#)
- b. Our work with Fair Elections Portland and the Portland Charter Commission led to a deep dive into municipal elections; it highlighted the degree to which both Vote-for-N at-large elections and district-based single-winner elections can prioritize a majority coalition at the expense of minority voices. In some situations, these common voting methods can deliver 100% of the open seats to a coalition representing just 51% (or fewer) of the voters. See [LWVME memo to the Charter Commission.](#)

- c. Vote-for-N elections, in particular, have faced legal scrutiny under the 1965 Voting Rights Act, as this mechanism can dilute the voting power of racial minority groups. While the common remedy has been single member districts, a 2019 settlement between Eastpointe, MI, and the U.S. Department of Justice identifies Proportional RCV as a suitable remedy. See “[Designing State Voting Rights Acts](#)” from the Campaign Legal Center.)
- d. Multi-member districts also gained some attention during the 2021 redistricting process. The 2020 Census and 2021 redistricting led many scholars and advocates to redouble their efforts to establish multi-member districts for the U.S. House as a way to combat the effects of extreme partisan gerrymandering. During this hyper-partisan era, it has been suggested that multi-member districts - when combined with a proportional election method - might weaken extreme partisanship and promote the emergence of new political parties. In Maine, gerrymandering is not an urgent concern, as redistricting is in the hands of a bipartisan commission, and maps must be approved by supermajorities in both legislative chambers. In regard to the larger issue, the LWVME cannot by itself address federal reforms. Even so, these conversations about proportional representation in the U. S. House stimulated some thinking about proportional representation in the Maine State Legislature and in County Commission boards. Read more about reform proposals at [Fix Our House](#), [Proportional Representation: Reimagining American Elections to Combat](#), Mac Brower, Democracy Docket, 2021; and [The Case for Proportional Voting](#), Lee Drutman, *National Affairs*, Fall, 2021.
- e. While the 2021 redistricting process was complicated by the delay of census data, the process illuminated the difficulties inherent in drawing fair single-member districts. Multi-member House districts (particularly if aligned with Senate districts) might reduce the complexity of the redistricting process and lessen the importance and impact of district lines by eliminating the winner-take-all effect. See “[Anna Kellar: Lessons Learned From Maine’s Redistricting Process](#),” *Lewiston Sun Journal*.

Scope of the Study



With this background, our Study Committee embarked on an exploration of two key questions:

- a. What is our position on using RCV in multi-seat elections? Our current RCV position only covers single-seat offices.
- b. What is our position on creating more multi-member districts in order to optimize proportional representation:
 - At the municipal level?
 - At the state legislative level?

The briefing papers that follow provide definition, structure, and analysis designed to help League members and the public understand this issue better and explore whether, as an organization, LWVME can come to a consensus.