Colorado Secretary of State's Voting Methods Stakeholder Group
Comments from RCV for Colorado
Re: Presentation on 12/15/2020

The openness of elections administrators to innovation is why Colorado leads the nation in voter-centered, reliable elections. RCV for Colorado is grateful to the Office of the Secretary of State for convening this stakeholders group. As a non-partisan group led by a politically diverse board, we appreciate the opportunity to have a seat at the table to discuss reforms that are more fair to voters. The concepts we wish to underscore are as follows:

Why Ranked Choice Voting is being considered:
Voter satisfaction:
Currently, voters are largely dissatisfied with the current model of "plurality voting" because they feel that they have to vote strategically between the "lesser of two evils." University studies show an increase in voter satisfaction when voters can securely rank their choices, without worries of "spoilers" splitting the consensus. In April 2020, 88% of voters in Basalt's RCV election were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied."

Optimize mail-ballots:
Currently, when candidates drop out at the last minute, the voices of those voters are lost. In March 2020, over 150,000 votes in the Democratic Presidential Primary went uncounted for this reason. When ranked choice ballots are used, the voters' intent is preserved.

Replace high-cost, low-turnout runoffs:
Upgrading to a model that identifies a majority winner in one election would save money, help clerks, and aid military voters. Currently, municipalities like Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo have runoff elections. This is a cost burden. It creates short timelines for new ballots creates a quality control hazzard. Worst of all, military and overseas voters often do not get their ballots in time. In 2019, Denver spent over $800,000 on just such an unnecessary separate runoff election.

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Comparing voting methods:
Many systems of polling exist, however some fare better than others when implemented to the purpose of representative democracy.

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is a voter-friendly name for ranked ballots, which are currently defined in Colorado as Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). The model used in Minnesota, California, Maine, and others is IRV in single-winner races and Single Transferable Vote (STV) in multi-winner races. STV is a means of proportional representation, which is the most fair to the diversity of viewpoints among voters. STV holds great promise for Colorado because there are jurisdictions where large groups of voters have no hope of representation in plurality elections. The IRV/STV only model of RCV is shown in places like Minnesota to be reliable, fair, and popular. RCV for Colorado supports specifying IRV and STV to preclude types of ranked ballots which are not best practices - such as block preferential and bucklin.

Approval Voting (AV) has been considered as an option because some types are easy to tabulate. Block Approval Voting was tried in Fargo, ND in June of 2020. While the winners of that race each happened to get a majority of the votes cast, that method has no majority target. In a poll conducted by Triton, voters there reported having voted strategically. Consulting scholars like Jack Nagel and Jack Santucci are both anticipating that more and more voters will vote strategically each cycle. RCV for Colorado suggests not devoting resources to supporting administration of AV while it is proving to be less beneficial than RCV.

Voter-Centered:
Many voter-centered reforms are an up-front burden to the administrators. RCV is no exception. Identification and promulgation of best practices in voter education and administration will need grant-funded experts around the county and coordination with Colorado's Office of the Secretary of State.

As more municipalities modernize to RCV, RCV for Colorado supports all efforts to aid election administrators in continuing to deliver the most reliable elections in the nation.