



Friday April 21, 2017

Urban League of London Position on Ranked-Choice Voting

The Urban League of London has always worked to ensure that the concerns of our neighbourhoods and communities are represented on City Council. Our elected officials are the voices of our residents, and subsequently our communities, in the decision-making processes at City Hall. From the perspective of the League, it is critical that those elected to Council are representative of the diversity of our city.

Electoral reform can be a contentious topic: there are competing considerations around representation, education, awareness, and political engagement that matter deeply to the citizens of London. While ranked balloting is not the only form of electoral reform, it is the format currently being discussed at City Hall.

The Board of the League has gone to a considerable effort to educate itself and our membership on the issue of ranked ballots. In addition to attending the public information sessions hosted by the City on the topic, we hosted two separate events of our own: the first being a 'Pints and Politics' open discussion at Chaucer's Pub on April 13th. Later we arranged for a panel discussion to be held at our regular Urban League meeting on April 20th.

The 'Pints and Politics' event was an open public forum on the topic. Voices from all sides of this issue had a chance to be heard in an open and respectful conversation among citizens. The panel discussion at our April 20th meeting was more focused and educational. We heard presentations from Dave Meslin of Unlock Democracy Canada, and former City Councillor Sandy Levin.

Having listened to our expert panelists (and considered the opinions expressed at the meetings by our general membership and other interested citizens) **the Board of the Urban League of London encourages City Council to pilot the ranked-choice ballot format in the 2018 municipal election.**

We make this recommendation based largely on the recognition that electoral reform and democratic renewal has the potential to represent the diversity of voice and perspective in our city, as well as increase citizen engagement.

We believe that a more modern, renewed electoral system will ensure that elected officials receive a majority (rather than simply a plurality) of endorsement from their constituents. Additionally, the current, first-past-the-post voting system may discourage many candidates from joining the field due to the perceived "spoiler" effect; a more representative electoral process will encourage more diversity in the candidate sample.

We understand and appreciate the arguments of those opposing a ranked-choice ballot format—particularly concerns around voter education, civic awareness and increased cost—and therefore advocate for a one-time pilot of ranked ballots for the 2018 municipal election. This trial will allow residents and elected officials to adequately evaluate the effects of this reform and assess its success in adding diversity to the candidate pool and increasing civic engagement.

London has historically been a place of trial and experimentation, and has carved out a reputation as a "test city." Acknowledging the need to better represent the diversity of perspective, voices, and backgrounds of the city in the decision-making process, we encourage London to capitalize on this culture in the area of electoral reform.

As such, we encourage the City to pilot the ranked-choice ballot format in the 2018 municipal election.

-The Board of the Urban League of London