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Title:	Authorizing the Committee on Law & Government to hold hearings regarding the implications of a ranked-choice voting system for Philadelphia.				
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9/23/2021	0	CITY COUNCIL	ADOPTED		
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Authorizing the Committee on Law & Government to hold hearings regarding the implications of a ranked-choice voting system for Philadelphia.

WHEREAS, The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has a unified election system under its current Constitution, creating a single voter registry (limited to citizens 18 years of age or older), specifying specific days on which primary, special, and general elections are held each year, and providing a uniform voting machine procurement process, mandating campaign finance limitations, prohibitions, and disclosures, but allowing limited local variation, such as the City of Philadelphia's additional campaign finance strictures; and

WHEREAS, Across the country, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and City of Philadelphia, elections are usually dominated by candidates from two political parties; and

WHEREAS, This bifurcation is largely explained by the first-past-the-post system of voting most commonly used in the United States, which incents voters to cluster into two large coalitions reflected in opposing parties, to prevent each elector's most opposed candidate from securing a plurality; and

WHEREAS, In combination with national polarization, the advantages of incumbency, and other factors (the time and cost of campaigning, among the most obvious), many positions lack even that level of competition in general elections - huge swaths of the country are dominated by one set of partisans, despite covering a wide range of ideologies, approaches, emphases, and styles that are sorted through primaries; and

WHEREAS, Ranked-choice voting, sometimes called instant runoff voting, allows voters to rank candidates on their ballots, so that if one candidate does not secure a majority of votes, election officials can eliminate candidates with the fewest first-choice votes and immediately re-assign those voters to their next-choice candidate, until one candidate is favored over the remaining alternatives by a majority of voters; and

WHEREAS, According to Derringe v. Donovan, 308 Pa. 469 "The casting of a ballot is only a legal expression

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of the voters' will as to the men [sic] or measures voted upon, and it is a fundamental principle of popular government that in elections the will of the majority shall prevail, and, when it becomes impracticable by reason of the large number of candidates for a certain office to ascertain the will of the majority, the will of the plurality shall prevail"; and

WHEREAS, Acknowledging that there is not only one way to determine how such pluralities may be determined, other jurisdictions across the US have recently begun implementing ranked-choice voting; and

WHEREAS, In November 2019, New York City voters approved a measure to enact ranked-choice voting for primary and special elections beginning in 2021, making it the most populous jurisdiction in the U.S. to employ the ranked-choice voting election method; and

WHEREAS, The Maine Legislature approved a bill in 2019 (LD 1083) to extend the state's ranked-choice voting system to the presidential election, so that Maine voters were the first to vote for president using ranked-choice voting; and

WHEREAS, In November 2020, the State of Alaska approved a ballot initiative to establish ranked-choice voting, along with top-four primaries; and

WHEREAS, As of this year, one state (Maine) has implemented ranked-choice voting at the state level, eight states have jurisdictions with ranked-choice voting already implemented at some level, and another five states contained jurisdictions that had adopted but not yet implemented ranked-choice voting in local elections; and

WHEREAS, Whether across the Commonwealth for all offices, or limited to municipal elections, Philadelphians might be best served by the General Assembly allowing elections to be determined by candidates with the broadest support, rather than a system in which plurality winners assume office; now, therefore, be

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Council does hereby authorize the Committee on Law & Government to hold hearings regarding the implications of a ranked-choice voting system for Philadelphia.

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