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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

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The “Make All Votes Count DC” Campaign Adopts the Ballot Initiative 83 Petition

*Campaign Has Extensive Polling Showing a Majority of DC Voters
Support the Proposed Electoral Reforms*

Petition Circulators Hit the Streets to Solicit Signatures From Registered Voters

***** Campaign Staff & Petition Circulators Available for Interview & B-Roll *****

WASHINGTON, DC — Today at the monthly meeting of the DC Board of Elections, the proposer and chair of the Make All Votes Count DC campaign, Lisa D. T. Rice, officially adopted the ballot access petition for Ballot Initiative 83. Per DC law, the campaign now has 180 days to circulate the petition and collect the names, addresses, and signatures of 5% of the registered voters in five of the eight wards of the District to let voters decide on the initiative in the November 2024 general election ballot.

“We look forward to engaging and educating DC voters over the next six months as we begin circulating petitions to obtain ballot access,” said Ms. Rice. “DC voters want a proven way to hold politicians accountable to a majority of voters and I believe ranked choice voting is the best way to ensure all politicians will have to work hard for our votes. More importantly, I also want the one-in-six registered independent voters in DC, like me, to have a full say in all future taxpayer-funded elections. The time to end DC voter suppression is now.”

“The campaign has already trained 30+ volunteer petition circulators who are hitting the streets tomorrow to engage voters at busy locations in all 8 wards. From farmers markets to post offices and grocery stores to Metro stations, the campaign’s volunteers believe that the two electoral reforms outlined in Ballot Initiative 83 will resonate with voters across the District,” says Ward 2 resident and secretary of the campaign, Adam Eidinge, who has spearheaded numerous successful ballot measures in the nation’s capital since 2014.

The Make All Votes Count DC campaign has polling data indicating a strong majority of Washingtonians support Ballot Initiative 83 at levels higher than in previous polls. In May 2023, Lake Research Partners conducted a poll of 600 likely voters across the District of Columbia. The results

showed ranked choice voting had a very strong +41-point margin of support (62% Yes), with high intensity of support (46% Strongly Yes). Similarly, Opening the Primaries to Independent Voters also had a strong +39-point margin of support (62% Yes), with high intensity of support (46% Strongly Yes). *Poll results and crosstabs are available to members of the media upon request.*

“When we saw the results of the poll, we knew DC voters would be supportive of the reforms outlined in Ballot Initiative 83,” says Rice. “Poll results also showed that voters need to understand that ranked choice voting and opening the primaries to independent voters are not radical changes, but proven means to provide citizens with a more representative democracy.”

Contrary to opponents’ misstatements, Ballot Initiative 83 would not allow members of existing political parties to vote in the primary elections of a different political party. Thus, Republicans will not be able to vote in the Democratic primary or vice versa. Under current law, any voter can switch political parties up to 21 days before an election if they wish to participate in another party’s primary. This law is not impacted by Ballot Initiative 83.

Rather, Ballot Initiative 83 seeks to enfranchise DC’s 71,000 independent voters and let them vote in the primary of their choosing. Independent voters are excluded from DC’s primary elections each cycle, which is voter suppression. Often, government employees, journalists, lawyers, and others choose not to join any political party to avoid being targeted or perceived as partisan. Additionally, young people are now less inclined than ever before to register with a political party when they attain voting age. No one should be forced to join a political party to vote in taxpayer-funded elections.

“DC is a one-party town, but a lot of voters do not feel comfortable joining the one party. Nearly 1 out of 6 voters should not be silenced any longer,” says campaign treasurer and former Ward 8 Democratic State Committee member Philip Pannell. “Ballot Initiative 83 will help give a voice to the voiceless in DC’s primary elections.”

HOW RANKED CHOICE VOTING WORKS UNDER BALLOT INITIATIVE 83

From the voter’s perspective, the campaign focuses on what happens to your vote: Vote your favorite, and rank your back-up choices if you choose. If your 1st choice is in last place, your vote automatically goes to your next choice. This continues until someone wins over 50% of the vote.

Ballot Initiative 83 will give DC voters the choice to rank up to five candidates for each electoral race in which there are more than two candidates. Voters will still be able to vote for a single candidate, if they desire. After the polls close on election day, the DCBOE will tabulate all ballots as they currently do. If a candidate receives more than 50% of the vote during the first round of tabulation, the DCBOE will declare that candidate the winner. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, the DCBOE will eliminate the last-place candidate and redistribute that candidate’s votes to the voters’ second preferences. The DCBOE will then conduct a second round of tabulation; if no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote, the last-place candidate will be removed again and their votes redistributed to their next preference. This iterative process will ensure that after subsequent rounds of tabulation, the candidate who has at least 50% of votes will be declared the winner *with majority support*.

“Under our current electoral system, it’s hard to vote out unpopular politicians who keep winning when there are a dozen other candidates on the ballot,” said Bri Gomez McGowan, Ward 5 resident, a lead organizer from Rank the Vote DC, and campaign steering committee member. “I am tired of voting for the lesser of two evils. Voters should be able to vote their values and ranked choice voting is a solution. Moreover, I believe implementing ranked choice voting will protect the Black vote against displacement and help elect more women and people of color. Ranked choice voting is already utilized in New York City, San Francisco, and even across the border in Takoma Park, Maryland. It’s time for DC to consider this change and let the voters decide.” concludes Gomez McGowan.

WHY THE CHERRIES?

Featured prominently throughout the campaign’s literature are two cherries. In 2006, Mayor Anthony Williams signed the [Official Fruit of the District of Columbia Act](#), which made the cherry DC’s official state fruit. The campaign’s graphic artist, DC resident Cesar Maxit, chose the two cherries because Ballot Initiative 83 marries two electoral reforms: Opening the Primaries to Independent Voters and Ranked Choice Voting. Use of the cherries is a fun way to help educate voters about DC’s state fruit and help them better understand Ballot Initiative 83’s dual reforms.

BACKGROUND ON BALLOT INITIATIVE 83

The decision to pursue a ballot measure by local advocates came after exhausting all legislative options with the DC Council. After an extensive advocacy campaign by Rank the Vote DC to help pass the VOICE Act in 2021, the bill’s legislative impasse created momentum toward what would become Ballot Initiative 83. To broaden the coalition behind Make All Votes Count DC’s non-partisan campaign, advocates agreed that opening the primaries to independent voters, who are currently locked out of DC’s primary elections, was also a much needed reform.

The Make All Votes Count DC campaign registered with the Office of Campaign Finance and submitted its first iteration of the ballot initiative on May 17, 2023. After one legislative revision, the current version of Ballot Initiative 83 was resubmitted on June 16, 2023. The initiative’s original short title was the “Make All Votes Count Act of 2024,” which is the origin of the campaign’s official name.

The DCBOE held its Subject Matter Determination Hearing on July 18, 2023, and issued its decision that the initiative was proper subject matter on Friday, July 21. On August 22, the DCBOE held its hearing to finalize the short title, summary statement, and legislative text. At this hearing, the official short title of Ballot Initiative 83 was changed to “[Ranked Choice Voting and Open the Primary Elections to Independent Voters Act of 2024](#).”

The short title, summary statement, and legislative text were then published in the DC Register on Friday, September 1, 2023. The 10-day challenge period closed on September 11, 2023, with only one challenge filed, however not in a timely manner, as required by law. The DCBOE was prepared to issue Ballot Initiative 83 petitions on September 13, but the campaign sought an abeyance so that the pending challenge would be adjudicated and reforms outlined in the [Local Resident Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2022](#) would be implemented. To leverage the full 180 days allotted to ballot initiatives to achieve ballot access, the campaign requested to adopt the Ballot Initiative 83 ballot access petition at today’s hearing. The misfiled legal challenge, still pending in the DC Superior Court

(see case 2023-CAB-005414), will be adjudicated shortly. The campaign believes the challenge will have no bearing on the ballot access phase of the campaign.

Based on the January 2, 2024, DCBOE voter registration statistics, there are currently 445,650 registered voters in DC, including 71,575 independent voters. The campaign will need to collect at least 23,135 valid signatures from DC voters by Monday, July 8, 2024, to achieve ballot access.

If Ballot Initiative 83 is approved by voters in the November general election, and any potential funding requirements are appropriated by the DC Council in FY2025 and FY2026, the first applicable election of the *Ranked Choice Voting and Open the Primary Elections to Independent Voters Act of 2024* would be the June 2026 primary election. The campaign asserts that these two electoral reforms will help stop DC voter suppression and make it easier to hold local politicians accountable.

For more information about the Make All Votes Count DC campaign visit: www.MakeAllVotesCountDC.org

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