

July 18, 2022

San Francisco Board of Supervisors  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, City Hall  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Re: Charter Amendment – City Elections in Even-Numbered Years (File No. 220638)

Dear Supervisors,

I am writing on behalf of RepresentUs to express our enthusiastic support for the proposed charter amendment to move San Francisco’s municipal elections to even-numbered years and readjust the signature threshold for voter initiatives (File No. 220638). RepresentUs is a nonpartisan election reform organization that seeks to dismantle the root causes of inequality in our democracy and end political corruption, extremism, and gridlock. RepresentUs is involved in efforts around the country to defend the integrity of the democratic process.

Consolidating local elections with even-year elections is a proven and commonsense way to improve turnout and save money. The evidence is overwhelming that holding municipal elections leads to significantly higher voter turnout.<sup>1</sup> Cities across California have experienced drastic increases in voter turnout after switching to even-year elections, and San Francisco *already* has much higher voter turnout for state and federal elections held on even years than it does in local elections.<sup>2</sup> In addition to turnout increases, consolidating elections makes financial sense. Research shows that cities using odd-year municipal elections spend significantly more per voter on elections than cities that consolidate local races with even-year elections.<sup>3</sup>

Voter participation is a complex issue that involves many different factors. It is rare to find a single change that directly and unambiguously creates an immediate and significant improvement in voter turnout. It is almost impossible to find a single change that causes such drastic increases in turnout while simultaneously saving money. Consolidating local elections to even years is essentially a public policy unicorn.

Our democracy faces grave challenges as efforts to roll back ballot access and undermine voting rights are rising across the country. San Francisco has the opportunity to be a national

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Marschall, Melissa, and John Lappie. “Turnout in Local Elections: Is Timing Really Everything?” *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* 17.3 (2018): 221-233; Berry, C. R. & Gersen, J. E., “The Timing of Elections,” 77 *U. Chi. Law Rev.* 37 (2010); Hajnal, Z. and Lewis, P. 2003. “Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections.” *Urban Affairs Review* 38(May): 645–68.

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Valverde Meneses and Eric Spencer, *Consolidation of Elections in California Creates Massive Gains in Local Voter Turnout*, California Common Cause (February 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Jose P. Hernandez, *RESEARCH BRIEF: Odd-Year vs. Even-Year Consolidated Elections in California*, The Greenlining Institute (October 2013).



leader in the fight to defend democratic values and encourage voter participation. We strongly encourage the Board of Supervisors to send this charter amendment to the ballot this Fall and let the voters decide for themselves.

Sincerely,

David O'Brien  
Policy Counsel

Caroline Joseph  
Research Analyst