

BILL NUMBER HB 362 / MC 13-22
BILL TITLE: Montgomery County - Voting Methods
POSITION: Support



February 4, 2022

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 362 / MC 13-22
Montgomery County – Voting Methods

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Ranked Choice Voting for Maryland

To The Honorable Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways & Means Committee:

On behalf of Ranked Choice Voting Maryland, a grassroots coalition working to expand voting across Maryland, we express our full support for HB 362 / MC 13-22 to enable new voting methods for Montgomery County.

We urge the members of the Ways and Means committee to listen to the voice of the Montgomery County Delegation which unanimously supports this legislation.

This bill empowers the local government to do what it does best - respond and innovate for their residents.

By giving Montgomery County the ability to evaluate and use new voting methods, we empower voters and ensure democracy across the DMV continues to be open and available to all. Marylanders deserve elections that are fair and utilize modern equipment to ensure the voice of voters are heard and respected.

Legislators have an opportunity to advance modern elections that are proven, effective and empowering for today's voters and future generations.

Our current system to elect leaders does not effectively handle contests with more than two candidates running. Voters end up splitting the vote and candidates win with a sliver of the electorate. We continue to see voters - especially young voters and voters of color - disenchanted with a process that leaves them feeling unheard and unrepresented. We can eliminate the spoiler effect, split voting, and ensure that the winner represents the broadest spectrum of the electorate with ranked ballots.

We know women and people of color are underrepresented in elected office. In Maryland, we rightfully celebrate when more women and people of color are representing our communities but we need to be intentional about creating a level playing field.

We have seen when it comes to housing and education, that the status quo maintains inequality. The same applies to our elections. Ranked choice voting is breaking the cycle of inequality.

We can see ranked choice voting in action in Takoma Park and across the United States. We now have two decades of data on the impact of ranked choice voting for women and people of color.

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1. **More women and people of color are elected to office.** Since the introduction of RCV, women have won more than 40% of all RCV contests, women of color have won almost a quarter of all RCV contests, and people of color have won 60 percent.
2. **RCV moves us toward gender parity and more opportunities for marginalized communities.** Seven cities using RCV have achieved gender parity; and in 2020 Salt Lake City Utah voters used ranked ballots for the first time to elect a diverse and majority LGBTQ council.
3. **Voters understand ranked choice voting.** An exit poll in New York City found that more than 75% of voters want to use ranked choice voting again with 95% of voters finding RCV ballots simple to fill out and 83% of voters ranking more than one candidate on their ballots.

This enabling legislation does not mandate the use of a voting method. It simply gives the county the ability to implement a voting method, if desired. It is the first step beyond simply studying its potential. And Montgomery County has studied the potential. Seven years ago, ranked choice voting was recommended by the Montgomery County Right to Vote Task Force. The County was not able to act on this recommendation because we did not have enabling legislation.

I urge the Ways and Means Committee to vote in favor of HB 362 / MC 13-22. Let's give our local government the power to choose a system that works best for their community.

Respectfully submitted by Michelle C. Whittaker
Statewide Coordinator, Ranked Choice Voting for Maryland