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The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chairman
And Members of the Education, Energy and The Environment Committee
Senate of Maryland
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: **SB 0493** – Ranked Choice Voting for Presidential Primary in 2028 - **UNFAVORABLE**

The Maryland Federation of Republican Women strongly opposes SB 0493 because Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) is confusing and manipulative.

A process of elimination rounds to finally reach a majority vote for a single candidate may work in a setting where everyone is in the room and can make an informed decision about the candidates in succeeding rounds; but that same opportunity for an informed vote does not exist with RCV when all choices must be made before the first (or succeeding) round results are known.

Ranked choice voting will introduce a complex system of voting that will be difficult for voters to understand. Presidential primary elections (governed by federal regulation) are not stand-alone elections. You could have one system for choosing your presidential candidate and a very different voting system for other offices on the ballot.

Concurrent with voting for your choice for president in the Primary, voters choose delegates to their National Convention, the Party's nominees for U.S. Senate and Congress, and judges. If pending legislation is enacted, the Primary may also include a special election for any State legislator appointed to their position since the last gubernatorial election.

RCV will likely require costly changes to the electronic software and hardware used for counting votes. Cost projections for this bill are not yet available; but the Fiscal Note for Montgomery County's 2023 Ranked Choice Voting bill (HB 344) estimated a cost of \$1.2 million in County funds and \$273,000 in State general funds to implement RCV in Montgomery County for the 2024 elections.

SB 0493 requires that the State Board of Elections (1) develop and pay the cost of a voter education program, (2) share that voter education campaign with the local boards, and (3) conduct and pay the cost of a survey of voters after the primary election to gauge their satisfaction with RCV.

The bill is unclear whether the State Board of Elections will pay only for the development of the voter education program or whether the State Board will be burdened with the entire cost to reach all registered voters in Maryland (4.1 million in 2022) and to train election judges and election officials at the local, county and state levels.



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The more candidates involved, the more cumbersome and tedious the process. Voters will need much longer to make 3 or more choices for each position on the ballot. Some election day voters are likely to walk away from the polls if the line is too long or moving too slowly. Mailed ballot voters will have no one present to explain the new, complicated process. Voters exasperated with the complicated and burdensome RCV ballot may skip the down-ballot local races. Statistics already show a decrease in the number of votes cast in those very important down-ballot races, including school board races.

RCV will complicate and slow the process of counting votes and certifying election results. RCV requires complex and confusing formulas for calculating votes that will undermine the public's confidence in election results. A jurisdiction's inability to open and close polls on time or to promptly calculate and certify election results will have a negative impact on the entire state.

Election results do not reflect the projected benefits of the most recent changes to election law and the voting process (Early Voting, Mail-In Voting, Drop Off Boxes, Same Day Voter Registration and Voting, etc.). In fact, in the statewide 2022 General Election, the Maryland State Board of Elections' Official Turnout Reports show voter turnout was down 10 percent statewide from the 2018 General Election.

The decrease in voter turnout (2022 vs 2018) was greatest in Maryland's largest counties, where turnout dropped 10 to 15 percent:

Prince George's County 15%
Charles County 13%
Montgomery County 12%

Baltimore City 11%
Baltimore County 10%
Howard County 10%

Multiple changes in the election process confuse voters, undermine confidence in the election process, and make people question election results. This legislation could set a statewide precedent for changing the method of voting for all elected offices.

Let's not replace our democratic process – majority picks the winner – with RCV.

Please vote an **UNFAVORABLE** report on **SB 0493**.

Sincerely,
Ella Ennis
Legislative Chairman