CHERYL C. KAGAN
Legislative District 17
Montgomery County

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Vice Chair
Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

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Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee

Joint Committee on Federal Relations

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Ranked Choice Voting for the 2028 Presidential Primary (SB493)
Senate Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee: March 4, 2024, 1:00pm

Our current "choose-one" election system frequently denies voters options and encourages negative campaigning. Strategic voting often prevails to avoid "wasting" votes on less competitive candidates. In primary elections, those who win with a plurality of votes perform worse in general elections than those who win with a majority – a phenomenon that is possible under the current system. Electoral reforms are needed to increase representation and enhance the integrity of the democratic process.

SB493 would implement Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) solely for the 2028 Presidential Primary Election. The State Board of Elections would create an educational campaign and share it (free of charge) with Local Boards of Elections. Political parties and individual candidates will also work to educate the public. A post-election report created by the SBE, due in January 2029, would include data on voter satisfaction; administrative or implementation challenges; any increased need to cure ballots; and recommendations for use in future elections.

RCV allows voters to select the candidates in order of preference. If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, that person wins. If there is no majority winner after counting first choices, the race is decided by an "instant runoff." The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and votes for that candidate are reallocated to the voter's number two choice. This process continues until one candidate earns majority support.

RCV empowers voters by fostering a system in which victory requires broad support. This motivates positive campaigning, encourages civility, and enhances cooperation among candidates. According to FairVote, this method also improves representation for underrepresented communities. When NYC implemented RCV in 2021, the mayoral primary election had the highest voter turnout in over 30 years.

Unlike other alternative voting systems, RCV is widely used and tested. Our neighbors in Arlington, Virginia have employed this system. Takoma Park, MD has been using it for nearly 20 years. This voting method is also used in Australia, Alaska, Maine, and many jurisdictions around the country.[1] RCV has been or will be used in Democratic Presidential Primaries in Alaska,

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[1] AK; Albany, CA; Arden, DE; Arlington, VA; Basalt, CO; Benton County, OR; Berkeley, CA; Bloomington, MN; Bluffdale, UT; Boulder, CO; Broomfield, CO; Burlington, VT; Cambridge, MA; Carbondale, CO; Corvallis, OR; Cottonwood Heights, UT; Draper City, UT; Easthampton, MA; Elk Ridge, UT; Genola, UT; Goshen, UT; Heber City, UT;

Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Nevada, and Wyoming. In Republican Party elections or conventions, Virginia and Indiana have used this system. Pennsylvania, Delaware, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma Democrats have used this method in Party elections or conventions. Both parties in Utah already use this system.

With nearly four years to prepare, education and implementation are feasible. The voting equipment currently used in all Maryland jurisdictions is RCV-capable and only needs compatible software upgrades to process ballots.

Now is the time to embrace RCV as many others already have. This voting system embodies the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and empowerment that lie at the heart of a vibrant democracy.

I urge a favorable report on SB493.

Las Cruces, NM; Lehi, UT; Magna, UT; Maine; Midvale, UT; Millcreek, UT; Minneapolis, MN; Minnetonka, MN; Moab, UT; New York City, NY; Newton, UT; Nibley, UT; Oakland, CA; Palm Desert, CA; Payson, UT; Portland, ME; River Heights, UT; Riverton, UT; Salt Lake City, UT; San Francisco, CA; San Leandro, CA; Sandy, UT; Santa Fe, NM; St. Louis Park, Minnesota; St. Paul, MN; South Salt Lake, UT; Springville, UT; Vineyard, UT; Woodland, UT