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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 423 - ELECTION LAW -  
AFFILIATING WITH A PARTY AND VOTING - UNAFFILIATED VOTERS**

**February 6, 2024**

**By Charlie Cooper, President**

Get Money Out–Maryland is an all-volunteer force seeking to get big money out of our political system and make elections fairer. We believe that every citizen should have equal access to the ballot as a voter or as a candidate. District lines should be fair to every voter, regardless of race, ethnicity, or party affiliation. The corruption of big money in politics must be eliminated, and the disproportionate influence of concentrated wealth reduced.

To advance these goals, we strongly support HB 423. It builds on the success of the General Assembly, [HB 1499](#) (2013), which authorized public campaign finance systems that have proven successful in several jurisdictions. HB 423 will provide a test case in Montgomery County for ranked choice voting, a promising reform that is finding acceptance across the nation.

The current winner-take-all system can under certain circumstances fan the flames of division among the electorate. Given the rancor in our national politics, it is critical that we evaluate reforms that might nurture a culture of consensus. By requiring a majority of votes cast to win public office – rather than the current system, in which a winner may have only a plurality – ranked choice voting might help build support for officeholders.

Adopted in states and communities across the country, ranked choice voting has been chosen for state primary, congressional, and presidential elections in [Alaska](#) and [Maine](#). It has also been approved for local elections in more than 20 U.S. cities, from Cambridge, Massachusetts and New York (including its five boroughs) to San Francisco and Takoma Park, Maryland.

San Francisco’s experience suggests that ranked choice voting can enhance public engagement. The city is comparable in size to Montgomery County, which has 27% more registered voters (686,785 versus 498,197 in 2022). Since San Francisco introduced ranked choice voting in 2004, its number of registered voters has climbed from 448,948 to 501,860, a 12% increase, slightly outpacing population growth.

The current election system often prevents voters from choosing their preferred candidate for fear of “splitting the vote” among those who generally support the same ideology and policies, and thus allowing a candidate they oppose to win the race. Ranked choice voting could reduce this “spoiler” effect.

It would also give candidates an incentive to avoid negative campaigning. Instead of bashing an opponent, a candidate would be more inclined to court that opponent's supporters in hopes of garnering their second-choice votes.

Most importantly, ranked choice voting would give citizens a greater stake in elections. By assigning an order to favored candidates, they would have a greater sense that their votes impact election outcomes. And when a majority of votes cast is needed to win, rather than the current winner-take-all system, they would feel part of a more truly representative democracy.

Elected officials in Montgomery County have expressed interest in an alternative voting system, and the General Assembly should exercise leadership as it did in 2013 to improve our electoral system.

We urge the Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report for HB 423.