Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 423   (Montgomery County Delegation)

Ways and Means

Montgomery County – Voting Methods MC 1–24

This bill authorizes the Montgomery County Council to adopt, by law, a ranked-choice voting system or an approval voting system for specified elections. **The bill takes effect January 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: If a ranked-choice voting system is adopted in Montgomery County for the 2026 elections, general fund expenditures increase by approximately $240,000 in FY 2026 and by varying amounts in future years.

Local Effect: If a ranked-choice voting system or an approval voting system is adopted in Montgomery County for the 2026 elections, Montgomery County expenditures increase by approximately $1.1 million (for a ranked-choice voting system) or approximately $601,000 (for an approval voting system) in FY 2026. Costs are incurred in future years but at a reduced overall level.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill authorizes the Montgomery County Council to adopt, by law, a ranked-choice voting system or an approval voting system for elections for any one or more of the following offices: county executive; member of the county council; judge of the circuit court; State's Attorney; register of wills; sheriff; and member of the board of education. The enacted local law may provide for the ballot format, procedures for

tabulating votes, and any other provision necessary to implement ranked-choice voting or approval voting. The enacted local law must provide for an educational campaign explaining how to vote using ranked-choice voting or approval voting.

"Ranked-choice voting" means a method of casting and tabulating votes in which voters rank candidates in order of preference and votes are tabulated in a manner that reflects voter preference.

"Approval voting" means a method of casting and tabulating votes in which voters may choose any number of candidates and the candidate chosen most often is elected.

Current Law:

Uniform Election Process

State election law, which generally governs all elections except municipal elections (other than in Baltimore City), requires that the electoral process for primary elections, general elections, and special elections be uniform, except where it would be inappropriate, or where exceptions are provided for in the law.

Voting/Tabulation Method

Generally, in elections governed by State election law, voters are able to choose in each race a number of candidates equal to the number of offices being filled in that race (*e.g.*, one candidate in a State Senate race and three candidates in some House of Delegates races), and the winners are nominated or elected based on which candidates receive the greatest number of votes.

State Fiscal Effect:

Fiscal 2026 Estimate

If a ranked-choice voting system is adopted in Montgomery County for the 2026 elections, general fund expenditures increase by approximately $240,000 in fiscal 2026. The bill is not expected to materially affect State finances if an approval voting system is adopted.

Costs Paid for by the State

This estimate assumes that the State pays only for its share (50%) of costs in certain categories of costs, which are traditionally shared by the State and counties, primarily voting equipment and paper ballots. Pursuant to Section 9-106 of the Election Law Article of the Maryland Code, the State shares costs of the statewide voting system with the

counties, including the cost of printing ballots. Since a ranked-choice voting system or an approval voting system would be limited to Montgomery County and implemented through action by the Montgomery County Council, this estimate assumes the remainder (and the majority) of the costs is paid for by the county (either directly or through billing by the State).

Future Year Estimates

Expenditures increase by varying amounts in future years for a ranked-choice voting system. General fund expenditures increase by approximately $184,000 in fiscal 2027, $223,000 in fiscal 2028, and $190,000 in fiscal 2029.

Local Fiscal Effect:

Fiscal 2026 Estimate

If a ranked-choice voting system or an approval voting system is adopted in Montgomery County for the 2026 elections, Montgomery County expenditures increase by approximately $1.1 million (for a ranked-choice voting system) or approximately $601,000 (for an approval voting system) in fiscal 2026. This estimate assumes costs are first incurred in fiscal 2026; however, a portion of those fiscal 2026 costs may instead be incurred in fiscal 2025, depending on the timing of the implementation of a ranked-choice or approval voting system.

Costs Paid for by Montgomery County

As mentioned above, under State Fiscal Effect, this estimate assumes that certain costs are shared by the State and the county, but the majority of the costs are paid for by the county, either directly or through billing by the State. **Exhibit 1** provides more detail of those costs.

This estimate also assumes that the initial ranked-choice voting system that is developed (if that system is chosen) is not fully integrated into the State's existing election systems. Once ranked-choice voting results are tabulated through software independent from the State's voting system, those results are made public independently from other Montgomery County and statewide election results and are not reintroduced into the State's election systems to be aggregated and published with other results. Developing a fully integrated system results in greater overall costs.

Exhibit 1
Fiscal 2026 Montgomery County Expenditures

Cost Category	Ranked-choice	Approval Voting	Description
Election Management System Programming	$383,000	$383,000	Partial integration of ranked-choice voting system or approval voting system into SBE's election management system (including project management, planning, development, and testing).
Tabulation of Results	42,000	0	Cost of (1) dedicated laptops to run results tabulation software and (2) extensive testing of the software (the software itself is expected to be available at no cost).
Subject Matter Expert(s)	101,000	0	Personnel to assist the Montgomery County Board of Elections with implementation in 2026 ($101,000 reflects half of the costs, with the other half incurred in fiscal 2027).
Other Contractual Services	30,000	0	Documentation, training, absentee ballot mailing, and other services.
Increased Specimen Ballot Costs	16,000	8,000	Increased length of specimen ballots for ranked-choice voting and approval voting.
Voter Outreach	210,000	210,000	Direct mailing and/or other voter outreach methods.
Increased Paper Ballot Costs	161,000	0	Increased length of ballots for ranked-choice voting.
Additional Voting Equipment and Election Judges	87,000	0	An additional ballot scanner and election judge at each of 76 high-volume polling places, to mitigate additional time added to the voting process by ranked-choice voting.
Election Staff and Training Video	60,000	0	Primarily additional local board of elections staff compensation and minimal cost of training videos for ranked-choice voting.
Total	**$1.1 million**	**$601,000**	

SBE: State Board of Elections

Future Year Estimates

Costs are incurred in future years but at a reduced overall level. For a ranked-choice voting system, Montgomery County expenditures increase by approximately $601,000 in fiscal 2027, $538,000 in fiscal 2028, and $505,000 in fiscal 2029. For an approval voting system, Montgomery County expenditures increase by approximately $218,000 in fiscal 2027 through 2029.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 344 of 2023; HB 362 of 2022; and HB 767 of 2021.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery County; Maryland State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

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km/sdk

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