



**Barbara Noveau, Executive Director, DoTheMostGood**

**House Committee:** Ways and Means

**Testimony on:** HB0767– Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 22-21

**Position:** Favorable

**Hearing Date:** February 16, 2021

**Sponsored By:** Montgomery County Delegation, Delegate Gabriel Acevero, lead sponsor

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grassroots organization with more than 2500 members who live in a broad range of communities in Montgomery County, from Bethesda at the DC line north to Frederick and from Poolesville east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that uplift all members of its communities. As we did when this virtually identical bill was introduced in 2019, DTMG strongly supports HB0767/MC 22-21. We do so because Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) amplifies the voices of the people being represented, helps to ensure that the majority of voters view the winner favorably, and de-stigmatizes minority party candidates.

As before, HB0767 is enabling legislation, authorizing the Montgomery County Council to implement— should it decide— a ranked choice or approval voting method for certain County elections. It does not require the County to implement it if it decides not to, nor does it impact any other jurisdiction in the state.

Since 2019, we've seen more locations, from Alaska to Maine to New York City, adopt RCV for some of their elections. In Montgomery County, where 2 more district seats will be added to the County Council in 2022, we can expect another highly competitive election that will benefit greatly from RCV or approval voting. Efforts to field more women and minority candidates will, as before, bring many candidates with similar priorities into competition with each other. RCV is ideally suited to elevate the candidate of whom the majority of voters approve as opposed to the one who received the largest plurality, no matter how small it was.

In 2018, we had many single seat contests in Maryland that were won with pluralities of 25% or 35%, and multiple seat races by as little as 8%. In many of these contests, it was easy to identify 2 or more candidates who undoubtedly split a particular vote that, in total, was greater than the vote for the winner. You could say a number of winners did not have a mandate to govern. As Arthur Spitzer, Montgomery County resident and Legal Director of the ACLU of the District of Columbia, observed after that election, "This year's election in Montgomery County provided an object lesson in the imperfections of a plurality-based system....As the number of candidates for a given seat increases...it is entirely common for a race...to be won by a candidate...who is affirmatively disliked by a majority of voters."

The answer isn't to discourage candidates from running or to back away from public financing. It's to improve our elections with a majority voting method where every winner is liked by a majority of voters.

There are three major reasons to wholeheartedly support HB0767:

- **Voter Empowerment:** Ranked Choice Voting enables voters to express their preferences better by eliminating strategic voting or voting for the 'lesser of two evils'.
- **Local Innovation:** Local government is the place for innovation and can lead the way for the state. Giving jurisdictions the flexibility to use additional voting methods creates opportunities to demonstrate how innovation can improve voter experience.
- **First Step Legislation:** HB0767 enables Montgomery County to determine and select the best voting method for local elections. It does not prescribe a voting method to use; nor does it impact elections outside of those certain ones included in the legislation.

Therefore, DTMG strongly supports HB0767/MC 22-21 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Noveau  
Executive Director, DoTheMostGood  
barbara@dtmg.org  
240-338-3048