

BILL NUMBER HB 767

BILL TITLE: Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 22-21

BILL CONTACT: Del. Gabriel Acevero

POSITION: Support



February 12, 2021

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 767 Voting Methods for Montgomery County

To The Honorable Chair Anne Kaiser, Vice Chair Alonzo Washington, and the Ways & Means Committee:

I. The Promise of Democracy

The promise of democracy is most often exercised through our individual and collective voice on the issues that matter most to our community. It is a promise that we continue to fight for to advance fairness and justice. Despite the progress we've made to deliver on this promise, we continue to limit the voice of voters in a fundamental way -- how we express our choices for elected office. Better voting methods are needed to allow local jurisdictions to adapt and respond to the unique dynamics of their communities.

Montgomery County residents are eager to expand the voice of voters through better voting methods. Ranked Choice Voting for Maryland, a grassroots coalition of advocates and organizations supports enabling legislation HB767. Local government is the ideal place for innovation to help improve our democracy. HB767 empowers our local leaders and ensures participation is open and available to all.

II. We Need Better Voting Methods

Our current plurality system to elect leaders does not effectively handle contests with more than two candidates running, and voters end up splitting the vote among like-minded candidates. We can eliminate the spoiler effect, split voting, and ensure that the winner represents the broadest part of the electorate.

Here is how ranked choice voting works:

In a ranked choice voting election, voters rank candidates in order of preference (first choice, second, choice, and so on). All the first choices are tallied and if a candidate has a majority of the vote, they win. If no candidate has a majority, a round-by-round elimination starts. The candidate in last place is eliminated and the voters who ranked that candidate first have their next choice counted. This continues until a candidate earns a majority of the vote.

For voters, ranked choice voting is an intuitive process -- like selecting a dessert or movie to watch. It makes sense because it's what we do in our life already and empowers voters. When voters have the power to express their choices, our election outcomes are more reflective of the electorate.

There are three major benefits to ranked choice voting that appeal to voters and candidates alike:

1. **Ranked choice voting gives voters the freedom to fully express support for their preferred candidates.** No fear of vote splitting or hurting your favorite candidate.
2. **Ranked choice voting strengthens fair representation.** Candidates must earn the broadest possible support to win and it is the will of the people that is the ultimate outcome.

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3. **Ranked choice voting embodies a reflective democracy and gives more communities an opportunity to run and win.** Major cities in the California Bay Area and Minnesota have seen an increase in the number of women and people of color who run and win.

One of the most exciting and cost-effective innovations for election administrators is the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center's Universal Tabulator¹. The tabulator is a federally tested open sourced tool that can be used by election administrators (or the general public) to tally ranked ballots. The tool can be configured to meet a jurisdiction's specific election law and voting system guidelines. It has been used in other jurisdictions across the United States and will see it's largest use in New York City's special election and primary contests this year.

More jurisdictions continue to embrace ranked choice voting because it meets the needs of voters and the outcomes are more representative of the electorate.

My written testimony includes information on how ranked choice voting works for single-winner and multi-winner elections. Regardless of the type of election the desired outcome is the same: a winner who is representative of the electorate. Multi-winner RCV achieves this through proportional (fair) representation that ensures that the candidates who win are the candidates who earn a significant share of the electorate.

III. Critical First Step

We are asking the Ways & Means Committee to empower Montgomery County leaders to respond and adapt to elections with the ability to use better voting methods. In 2014, the Montgomery County Right to Vote Task Force recommended the County Council include ranked choice voting as a key change to local elections. The County was not able to act on this recommendation because it lacks the ability to innovate without the General Assembly's action first. The unanimous support from the Montgomery County Delegation in 2019 was indicative of the growing support across the county. This bill is an important first step for Montgomery County to be able to determine the system that works best for their needs.

Advocates and community leaders are well equipped to successfully evaluate and implement new voting methods. We have access to best practices offered by Maine (which uses the same voting equipment as Maryland) and the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, a resource hub for election administrators on ballot design, implementation, and reporting.²

It is time to give local governments the power to choose the best system for their community. We recommend a favorable report for HB767.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by Michelle C. Whittaker

Statewide Coordinator, Ranked Choice Voting for Maryland

¹ RCV Universal Tabulator <https://www.rcvresources.org/rcv-universal-tabulator>










² Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center. <https://www.rcvresources.org/ballot-design-lib/ballot-design>

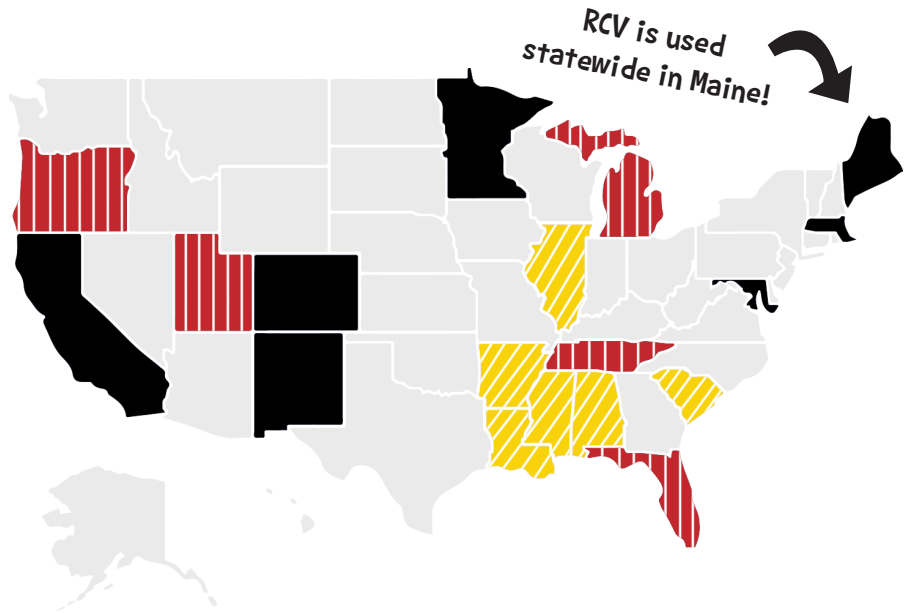
RANKED CHOICE VOTING

(Single-winner edition)

HOW IT WORKS

It's simple! Voters get to rank candidates in order of choice. If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, they win, just like any other election. If not, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who picked that candidate as 'number 1' will have their votes count for their next choice. This process continues until a candidate wins with more than half of the votes, which is a majority.

BLACK			
YELLOW			
RED			



USING RCV NOW

- Berkeley, California
- Cambridge, Massachusetts*
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Oakland, California
- Portland, Maine
- Maine
- San Francisco, California
- San Leandro, California
- Santa Fe, New Mexico
- St. Paul, Minnesota
- Takoma Park, Maryland
- Telluride, Colorado

OVERSEAS VOTERS

- Arkansas
- Alabama
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- South Carolina
- Springfield, Illinois

COMING SOON!

- Amherst, Massachusetts*
- Benton County, Oregon
- Cottonwood Heights, Utah
- Ferndale, Michigan
- Las Cruces, New Mexico
- Lehi, Utah
- Memphis, Tennessee
- Payson, Utah
- St. Louis Park, Minnesota
- Salem, Utah
- Sarasota, Florida
- Vineyard, Utah
- West Jordan, Utah

* Multi-winner ranked choice voting only

BENEFITS OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING

WINNERS WITH BROAD SUPPORT

Ranked choice voting ensures candidates win elections with the broadest possible support, upholding the principle of majority rule that legitimizes outcomes for voters and candidates. Without RCV, candidates can win primaries or general elections with far less than 50% support.

VOTE YOUR CONSCIENCE

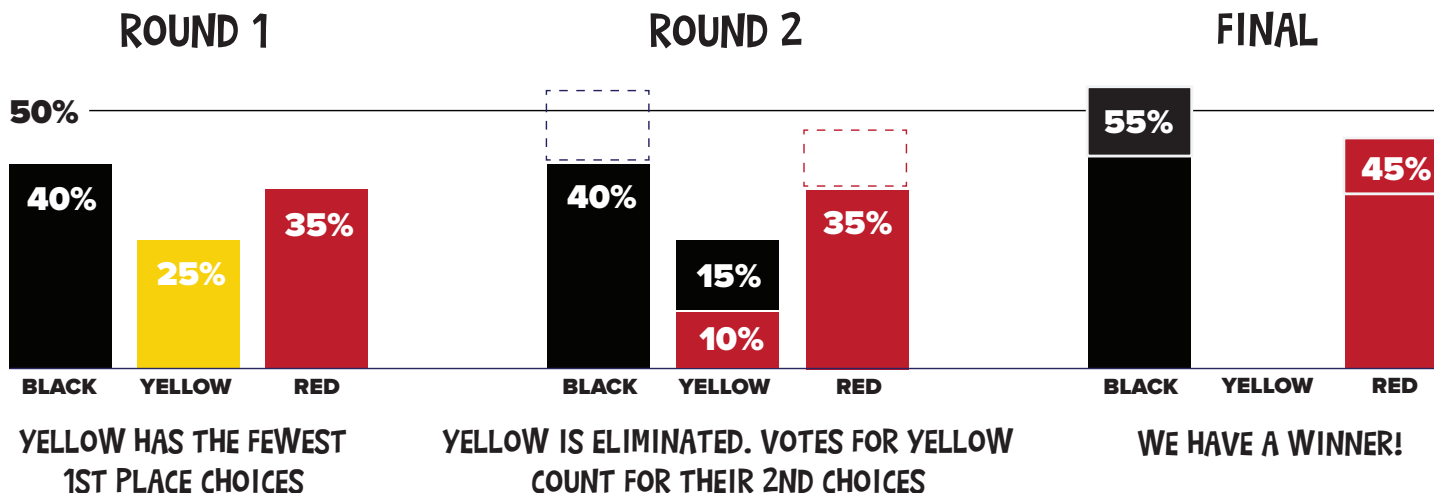
No more strategic voting. Ranked choice voting frees voters to choose the candidates they like best, without fear of wasting their vote and inadvertently helping elect the candidate they like least.

CIVIL CAMPAIGNS

Candidates are incentivized to work together or find common ground on issues in the hopes of earning voters' backup choices.

MORE COMPETITION CREATES REFLECTIVE OUTCOMES

With more candidates and choices, elections become truly competitive, electing winners who reflect the views of the widest number of constituents. And even in crowded fields, similar candidates can compete without splitting votes. Whether Republican, Democrat, independent or third-party, all candidates can compete without worrying about the "spoiler effect."



MULTI-WINNER RANKED CHOICE VOTING

HOW IT WORKS

Just like a single-winner ranked choice voting election, backup choices are counted if no one earns enough first choices. But rather than a single winner who represents an entire district, multiple people represent a portion of the district, and therefore each only need a portion of votes to win.

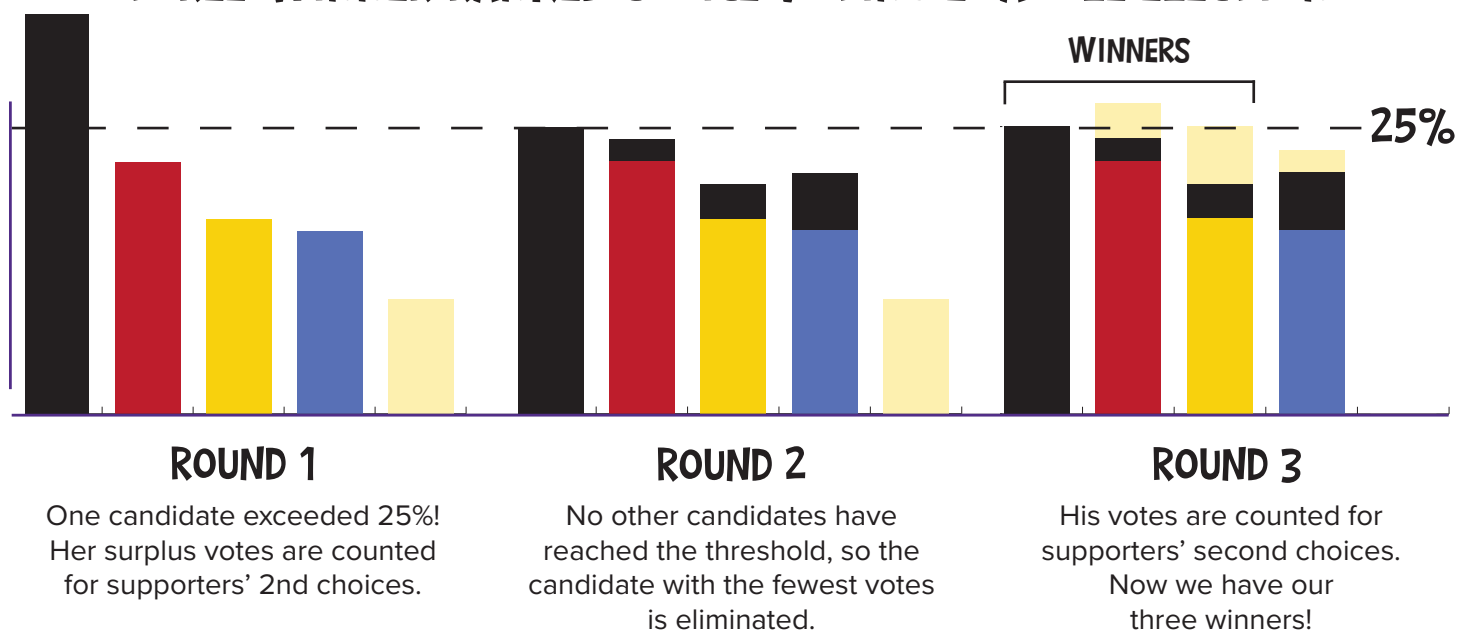
Voters rank candidates in order of choice. All first choices are counted, and if a candidate has enough votes, they win. The percentage of votes required depends on how many seats are being elected - the more seats there are to fill, the lower the percentage needed to win. For example, in a three-winner race, a candidate must win more than 25 percent of the vote to be elected.

If a candidate wins with more votes than the election threshold, but not all seats have been filled, any extra votes count proportionally toward voters' next choices. For example, if a candidate receives 10 percent more first choices than what was needed to win, then a tenth of each of their supporters' votes count toward their next choices.

If no candidate has more votes than the election threshold, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who picked that candidate have their votes count for their next choice. This repeats, just like with single-winner ranked choice voting.

This process continues until every seat has been filled.

THREE-WINNER RANKED CHOICE VOTING EXAMPLE ELECTION

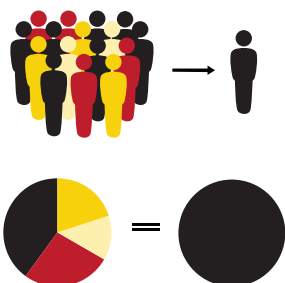


WHY IT WORKS

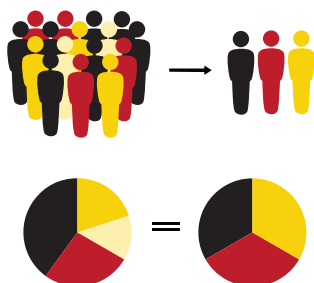
FAIR REPRESENTATION

Whether in the majority or minority, voters' choices truly count. This creates governing bodies who reflect the diverse views and experiences of the people they represent.

WINNER-TAKE-ALL



FAIR REPRESENTATION



MULTIPLE WINNERS WITH BROAD SUPPORT

Candidates competing in a multi-winner election must receive broad support in order to win, legitimizing outcomes for candidates and voters alike and giving winners a strong mandate to govern.

CIVIL CAMPAIGNS

Candidates are incentivized to work together in the hopes of earning voters' backup choices. Issues, rather than personal attacks, take center stage.

NO MORE GERRYMANDERING

Multiple winners makes it virtually impossible for politicians to manipulate maps to their advantage. This ensures competitive elections that restore power to voters.



MARYLAND CD3

	1 ST CHOICE	2 ND CHOICE	3 RD CHOICE	4 TH CHOICE	5 TH CHOICE
CANDIDATE A	1		3	4	5
CANDIDATE B		2	3	4	5
CANDIDATE C	1	2	3		5
CANDIDATE D	1	2	3	4	
CANDIDATE E	1	2		4	5