Green Party of Montgomery County, MD

HB 362, Voting Methods Enabling Legislation (in support of the bill)

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To the House Ways & Means Committee, February 8, 2022

For the benefit of all Montgomery County voters *and* legislators, we ask that you endorse and support HB 362, the enabling legislation that gives the Montgomery County Council the option of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) or approval voting (AV) for Montgomery County elections.

Although all voters benefit from these more democratic voting methods, we believe that Montgomery County has an especially pressing need for these options. Montgomery County has a history of non-majority winners. Our upcoming 2022 Montgomery County Executive Democratic primary will probably be a bitter, divisive fight, considering the candidates who've already announced. Without RCV, the Democrats' winning candidate will probably not have the support of a majority of voting Democrats.

County legislators need these voting options to properly respond to local electoral needs. And, these additional voting methods give voters the necessary tools to better register their choices. RCV is a proven voting method used in Maryland, across the US, and around the world, so it's no surprise that the bill enjoys the continued unanimous support of our County Council, Executive, and state Delegation. Indeed, all have been advocating for these options for some years now.

The Green Party is a long-time advocate of ranked choice voting. We helped ensure its passage in the City of Takoma Park in 2005, where voters approved RCV by 83%. We would love to see all Montgomery County voters enjoy the option of the greater democracy RCV can provide in correcting some of the serious flaws in our first-past-the-post electoral system.

We also support voter education. In 2006, the City of Takoma Park created a brief video to explain how easy it is and how to use the new ballots. Tools to educate voters and legislators already exist and are easily accessible through the [RCV Resource Center](#) and other reliable sources.

RCV is essential to allow voters to cast their ballots without "fear voting" and to fully express their choices, while eliminating the "spoiler" effect when more than two candidates exist. RCV provides an accurate reflection of the electorate's will, which our current system fails to do.

RCV is also critical because a third of all MD registered voters are unaffiliated. This fact is often not covered by the press in its election reporting; the mainstream media narrows coverage to the two parties they can cast in conflict.

The problems in our upcoming County Executive Democratic primary are mirrored in the 2024 Presidential election. The lack of RCV is similarly likely to deliver a Democratic presidential

nominee who is not supported by the highest proportion of voters and to ensure a lower and less enthusiastic voter turnout. So RCV would also benefit political parties.

We in the Maryland Green Party have multi-seat contests in our internal party elections, such as our two co-chairs and our 3 delegates and 3 alternate delegates to the national Green Party. Since our founding in 2000, we've used RCV and the standard single transferable vote (STV) to count the votes. Of the various STV tabulation methods, the simplest is the Scottish method; that's what we have used.

Unaffiliated voters, like third parties, are too often ignored and underrepresented. Third parties are responsible for much of what makes us proud to be Americans today. We are the ones who first advocated for the following great advances:

- the abolition of slavery—the Liberty Party and Free Soil Parties;

- women's right to vote—the Prohibition Party (the Democratic Party rejected the concept altogether, and the Republican Party balked at it);

- direct election of US Senators—the Populist Party;

- Social Security—the Socialist Party;

- And today, the "Green New Deal" solution to climate change was advocated for by the Green Party 10 years ago. It is now the banner of young Democratic representatives in Congress, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. But our members' votes don't count without RCV in this struggle for our planet and our future.

Third party voters don't spoil elections, poor voting methods do. Third parties are the victims, not the perpetrators—our supporters' votes are essentially dismissed in nearly all elections when they are in third place or below. The real culprit is first-past-the-post voting. Australia has used RCV for over 100 years, and is doing fine.

Please also note RCV is supported not just by the *Washington Post* but also by *The New York Times*, and even *The Economist* magazine—not exactly radical overthrowers of society.

Most of the developed world now votes with multi-party systems that don't penalize voters for having a range of views. Our "less than a majority" voting system keeps us trapped in a voting method instituted in 1789 as a relic of British colonialism. It has since been improved on elsewhere with many more democratic alternatives. RCV benefits all voters and is the gold standard for serving the interests of democracy. Let Montgomery County voters test this simple change to prove how well it works. We think others will love RCV as much as Takoma Park and Maryland Green Party voters do.

Thank you.

Resources

Plain English Explanation of Scottish STV, OpaVote, Nov. 23, 2016
https://blog.opavote.com/2016/11/plain-english-explanation-of-scottish.html