

House Ways and Means Committee  
HB 362 – Montgomery County – Voting Methods MC 13-22  
Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee:

I write as a Co-Chair of the Montgomery County chapter of Our Revolution Maryland. Along with Ranked Choice Voting Maryland and Fair Vote, we have advocated both for the expansion of public campaign financing, which we are also supporting with HB488, and for ranked choice voting, ever since our founding. We have supported various incarnations of enabling legislation to allow counties to expand their electoral systems to implement ranked choice voting or other methods of balloting that would allow voters to more meaningfully participate in our elections, and more accurately express their preferences.

We believe strongly in both public campaign financing and ranked choice voting to promote more public confidence in the system of elections. Taken together, they can empower the types of candidates who have been unable to compete in the past in privately financed, first past the post elections because they lack the resources or connections to raise the money needed to be taken seriously and to reach voters.

In Montgomery County, we have already come through one cycle with public financing of our County Council and County Executive races. That system was eye-opening, working beyond our greatest expectations. Almost 3 dozen candidates filed to run for 4 At-Large seats. Many of them sought public financing, knowing it was the only path to raising enough money to run county-wide in a county with over a million people. There were also multiple district level candidates who ran seeking to qualify for the public fund.

This very large field, however, produced results which may have been less than satisfying to the vast majority of primary voters. The four winners of the At-Large race received 12.2%, 9.6%, 8.0%, and 7.4% of the vote respectively. Those figures do not represent ringing endorsements by the voters. Indeed, there's a strong likelihood that the majority of voters would have preferred other candidates, under voting systems which would have better captured their preferences. This is equally true of General Assembly races, including one Senate race where most voters preferred one of two candidates who split the opposition to an incumbent delegate in a three-way race for an open seat.

We embrace the greater participation of voters which may have been a by-product of the large number of candidates competing in multiple races. Larger candidate fields, however, will continue to produce winners who lack any real support from the majority of those voting. Given that our current system of voting produces anomalous, anti-majoritarian outcomes, we believe it is crucially important to enact tandem legislation. Provide the County with the authority to fully implement public campaign financing while at the same time enabling the County to use alternate choice voting methods giving voters the power to express levels of approval for more candidates than there are seats available. Counting methods like ranked choice voting or

approval voting will produce winners of whom we can say they have a winning level of support under systems designed to capture the socially optimal choice or choices.

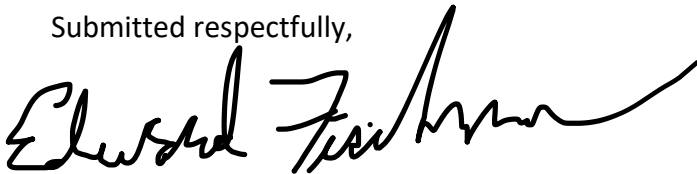
These systems of voting have been shown to work in other states. In Maine, an incumbent member of Congress was first elected using ranked choice voting, in an election where he trailed the other major party candidate under the more conventional counting employed in the first round. However, when the votes for 3<sup>rd</sup> party candidates were transferred to the two major party candidates, it became clear which candidate had the greater level of support among a majority of voters.

This is the type of outcome we must seek to produce, where the results are determined by a majority of voters, or a required plurality level, rather than by the vagaries of the number of candidates on the ballot.

Because we believe the logic of making this change is compelling, and as the Montgomery County delegation has expressed its support for the legislation, we urge you to advance this important enabling legislation. Montgomery County has worked as a proof of concept for public financing of campaigns, and we expect it will do the same for ranked choice voting.

We ask for a favorable report.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward Fischman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Edward Fischman  
Co-Chair, Our Revolution Montgomery County.

Many of the candidates who sought public funds failed to raise enough from local donors to qualify. Those who received public dollars were suddenly competing in rarefied air and were able to obtain donations from more than twice as many donors, on average, as those who ran with 'traditional' financing. All four winners in the At-Large race ran on public matching dollars.