

Ranked Choice Voting – HB0334

My name is Michael Fletcher. I have been a resident of Montgomery County for 47 years. During this time, I have noticed the changes made to our election system tend to diminish control of elections by local precincts and counties in favor of organizations with no accountability to the voters and whose methods are inscrutable to the voters. Examples are placing the responsibility for maintaining clean voter rolls with a third-party organization, ERIC, and counting our votes with programmable machines that nobody but the machine vendor can examine. The most recent example is the trend towards using Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) in our elections. RCV is a convoluted way to count votes that will require additional machines and software; and, once again, this will involve third party machine and software developers taking further control of our voting operations. Election outcomes would be determined by yet another algorithm under the control of third-party organizations. If you truly represent the voters of Maryland, you will oppose RCV. What you should be doing is returning to the voting system we used when I moved to Montgomery County in 1975, i.e., local control of the voting system. That system was believed by the voters to be fair and accurate. Under the current system, an increasing number of voters are not sure if their votes are accurately counted.

HB0334 would require the State BOE (SBE) to purchase voting machines and software capable of processing RCV results if the SBE approves placing the Takoma Park municipal elections on a state-wide ballot. This seems to be a convoluted way to get RCV approved state-wide because Takoma Park already uses RCV. (And the door will be opened to RCV in Montgomery County if [HB0344](#) is approved.) As I read HB0334, if it is enacted, the voting systems we now use could not be certified unless they could process RCV. Ostensibly, HB0334 would allow the SBE to take an action requiring Maryland and its counties to spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars on a new voting system. (I doubt the SBE has that budgetary authority.) It is also unreasonable that the voting choices in Takoma Park should have such a profound effect on the voting system in the entire state.

This is a specific comment on the draft bill stored – 10/25/22: The exception “if the City of Takoma Park’s municipal elections are approved by the SBE to appear on the State ballot.” should be added to paragraph VIII under Article - Election Law.

As of today, there is no fiscal analysis shown on the General Assembly website for this bill, so the costs to be incurred by the state and Montgomery County are unknown. However, if our current system cannot be certified, it will cost millions to upgrade or purchase new equipment. The document entitled “The Legislative Process”, available on the General Assembly website, states that the Department of Legislative Services prepares a fiscal analysis for each bill at the “Referral to Committee” stage. And Maryland State Government Code Ann. § 2-1505 prohibits voting on a bill without the analysis. It would appear that the Committee should await this fiscal analysis and evaluate it before voting on HB0334.