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Committee: Ways and Means
Testimony on: HB 344 Montgomery County – Voting Methods MC3-23
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 7, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 344. The bill will authorize the Montgomery County Council to adopt, by law, a ranked choice voting method or an approval voting method for elections to certain local offices.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. We believe the single-round, winner-take-all voting method has problems, such as allowing a candidate to win a multi-candidate race with a plurality that is far short of a majority. We support alternative electoral methods that better reflect the diversity of public opinion.

Research has shown that ranked choice voting, when compared to single-round plurality methods, can result in more candidacies and winning candidates who are women and particularly women of color.¹ Research also supports the premise that campaigns tend to be more civil and less negative when ranked choice voting is in use.²

This bill would authorize the Montgomery County Council to decide whether it wants to adopt a voting method for certain local offices that could result in increased diversity and more civil campaigns. If the bill is enacted, the Montgomery County Council would have local control to decide the method of voting for certain local offices and all the related procedural details.

We urge a favorable report on HB 344.

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¹ Sarah John et al., “[The alternative vote: Do changes in single-member voting systems affect descriptive representation of women and minorities?](#)”, Electoral Studies, Vol. 54, August 2018, 90-102. The results of this peer-reviewed study are also described in “[The Impact of Ranked Choice Voting on Representation: How Ranked Choice Voting Affects Women and People of Color Candidates in California](#)”, published by Representation2020.

² Todd Donovan et al., “[Campaign civility under preferential and plurality voting](#)”, Electoral Studies, Vol. 42, June 2016, 157-163.