

Comments on HB0344:

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 Montgomery County and Maryland, you will oppose RCV.

HB0344 seeks to clear the way for RCV in Montgomery County. RCV, and "Approval Voting" which also is defined in the proposed legislation, violate the principle of one voter, one candidate, one vote in the US Constitution by forcing voters to rank all candidates, even candidates they never heard of or candidates that are anathema to them. The results of elections are determined by another computer algorithm that generates a faux majority.

RCV divorces candidates from the issues. When multiple names on a ballot must be ranked it, is virtually impossible for a voter to know the platform of each candidate. RCV thus becomes a Pick-a-Name process. This allows marginal policies to creep into the body politic.

The RCV process would allow candidates to win without securing a majority of the votes. The election winner would govern without a mandate from the voters. The will of the voters would, therefore, be thwarted.

RCV opens the door for political parties to manipulate election results by adding and subtracting candidates on the ballot.

Instead of ballots being counted once, RCV ballots are counted repeatedly, creating massive opportunities for mistakes (and fraud) and making it nearly impossible to conduct a post-election audit. Hand recount audits of ballots would be impossible.

RCV is confusing and leads to voter disenfranchisement. During each round of ballot counting, some voters' choices will fall by the wayside, discarded, and those political voices, silenced. Despite spending millions to educate voters on RCV, New York City in its 2021 mayoral race, experienced massive chaos and confusion. So many minority voters' ballots were discarded that the head of the New York State NAACP said, "Ranked choice voting is not beneficial to minorities. It's voter suppression."

Implementation of RCV has been shown to reduce voter turnout rates. The complexity of the system discourages new and infrequent voters from participating.

Although Montgomery County voters are accustomed to waiting for election results, using RCV to eliminate runoffs does not guarantee faster results because the multiple rounds of vote tabulation can substantially delay the determination of a winner and increase the cost of the election.

What you, as representatives of the voters in Maryland, should be doing is initiating legislation to return 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. RCV will only make this uncertainty grow.

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. Nevertheless, Maryland State Government Code Ann. § 2-1505 prohibits voting on a bill without this analysis. It would appear that the Committee should await the fiscal analysis and evaluate it before voting on HB0344.