

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE, MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

HB 344 – Montgomery County - Voting Methods (MC 3-23)

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Bliss and Vicky Strella – Co-Presidents

Date: January 30, 2023

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County (LWVMC) supports HB 344, which authorizes the Montgomery County Council to adopt a law to allow ranked choice voting (RCV), or approval voting, to be used for elections for local offices in Montgomery County.

The League was founded on the belief that voters play a critical role in a democracy. RCV maximizes that ability by ensuring that winning candidates have support from a majority of voters. The League of Women Voters of Maryland believes that it is important that election systems: 1) produce representation that reflects community sentiment; 2) help increase voter participation by encouraging a broader range of candidates and more civil campaigns and 3) are feasible to implement. For these reasons, the League supports the use of Ranked Choice Voting.

Montgomery County voters would have found RCV to be very useful in the 2022 primary election when Democratic voters had to choose four Democratic candidates from a total of eight vying for the County Council at large seat, and one Democratic candidate from among four running for County Executive. The ultimate winner for the latter had less than 40% of the total votes cast, and the top two vote getters were separated by only 35 votes (less than 0.025%). RCV would have been able to determine which of the top two candidates received 50 percent or more of voter's first and subsequent choices.

- RCV empowers voters because it allows them to vote for their true first-choice candidate without feeling as though they might be “wasting” their vote.
- RCV empowers elected officials because they have a stronger mandate and more accountability when they know they are supported by a majority (at least 50%) of voters.
- RCV encourages more civil, less negative campaigns because candidates need to appeal to their opponents' supporters for their second-choice votes.

The LWVMC strongly urges a favorable report on HB 344.