



Ella Ennis, Legislative Chairman
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Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary, Chairman
and Members of the Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: **HB 344** – Montgomery County Voting Methods - Ranked Choice Voting - Approval Voting – **OPPOSED**

Dear Chairman Atterbeary and Committee Members,

The Maryland Federation of Republican Women strongly opposes HB 344 because Ranked Choice Voting is confusing and manipulative. This legislation could set a statewide precedent for changing the method of election, not just for local offices but all elected offices. Approval Voting degrades the sacred duty of voting for our elected officials to a popularity contest.

HB 344 grants the County Council a blank slate to set the process and rules for electing judicial as well as legislative offices in the County. It authorizes the County Council to adopt a local law that provides the ballot format, procedures for tabulating votes, and any other provision necessary to implement Ranked Choice Voting or Approval Voting. “Any other provision necessary” is very broad and raises the question of whether the County Council could authorize voting by non-citizens. The city of Takoma Park and several other Montgomery County municipalities already allow non-citizens to vote in their municipal elections.

Ranked Choice Voting will introduce a complex system of voting that will be difficult for voters to understand. An extensive and costly education program will be required to get voters comfortable with the process. While the Fiscal Note for HB 344 is not yet available, the Fiscal Note for last year’s HB 362, the Ranked Choice Voting bill, estimated a cost of \$2 million in County funds and \$252,000 in State general funds to implement Ranked Choice Voting in Montgomery County alone in 2024. Annual costs for FY 2025 – 2027 are estimated to be about \$700,000 for Montgomery County and \$270,000 in state funds.

The more candidates and positions involved, the more cumbersome and tedious it will be for a voter to make 3 choices for each position. Voters will need much longer to vote their ballot. Some voters are likely to walk away from the polls on election day if the line is too long or the line moves too slowly. Voters may skip down-ballot races because of the burdensome RCV process. Statistics already show a decrease in the number of votes cast in these very important down-ballot races, including school board races.

RCV will complicate and slow the process of counting votes and certifying election results. RCV will require complex and confusing formulas for calculating votes that will undermine the public’s confidence in the election results. A jurisdiction’s inability to open and close polls on time or to promptly calculate and certify election results will have a negative impact on the entire state.



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The Maryland General Assembly has made numerous changes to the election law and voting process in recent years (Early Voting, Mail-In Voting, Drop Off Boxes, Same Day Voter Registration and Voting, etc.). Election results do not demonstrate the projected benefits of these changes. Rather, a review of the Maryland State Board of Elections Official Turnout Reports shows that, in the statewide 2022 General Election, voter turnout was down 10 percent statewide from the 2018 General Election.

The decrease in voter turnout (2018 vs 2022) was greatest in Maryland's largest counties, where turnout dropped 10 to 15 percent:

<u>County</u>	<u>% Drop Off in Voting</u>
Prince George's County	15%
Charles County	13%
Montgomery County	12%
Baltimore City	11%
Baltimore County	10%
Howard County	10%

Let's not replace our democratic process – a majority picks the winner – with RCV. A process of elimination rounds to finally reach a majority vote for a single candidate may work in a setting where everyone is in the room and can make an informed decision about the candidates in succeeding rounds; but that same opportunity for an informed vote does not exist with RCV because all choices must be made before the first (or succeeding) round results are known.

Multiple changes in the election process confuse voters, undermine confidence in the election process, and make people question election results. For all of these reasons, please vote an **UNFAVORABLE** report on **HB 344**.

Sincerely,
Ella Ennis
Legislative Chairman
Maryland Federation of Republican Women