



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

**House Bill 344 - Montgomery County – Voting Methods
Ways and Means Committee – February 7, 2023
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2023 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County, with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC has formed an ad hoc committee, Advancing Democracy in Maryland, to examine and recommend actions that empower voters, achieve equality of voice and representation, and ensure the responsiveness of government institutions. We are guided by many of the recommendations of the report, [Our Common Purpose: Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century](#) issued in 2020 by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship. The report made 31 recommendations along with six strategies to "help the nation emerge as more resilient by 2026, the nation's 250th anniversary."

The ADM Committee will support legislative and executive branch directives that advance these aims. While we are all Democrats, we believe that advancing democracy is a non-partisan effort.

The ADM Committee's first recommendation, adopted by WDC, is to support HB344. This bill would allow Montgomery County to adopt a ranked choice voting (RCV) method or an approval method for elections for local offices in Montgomery County. Adoption of RCV at all levels is one of *Our Common Purpose's* 31 recommendations.

The evidence is clear that RCV is indeed exactly the kind of systemic change voters are looking for. A few examples:

RCV incentivizes positive campaigning. Voters are turned off by incessant negative campaigning. They are eager for change. RCV creates incentives for candidates to appeal more broadly and to aim to be at least a voter's second choice, if not their first. RCV motivates candidates to reach out to voters they might have ignored under plurality rules, and to behave with civility toward competitors.

RCV ensures that a winning candidate has majority support. In our current plurality voting system, candidates can win—and too often do—with less than a majority vote (See: Trump 2016). That is undemocratic and corrodes responsiveness to the electorate, and responsiveness *by* the electorate. Under RCV, that corrosion doesn't happen as winning candidates must achieve 50% +1 of the votes cast.



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RCV benefits women candidates and candidates and voters of color. Maryland gets a D grade on Represent Women's June 2022 [Gender Parity Index](#), which tracks all 50 states on progress towards parity in elective office. Research results to date show that [women candidates](#) fare better in jurisdictions that use RCV and a [Fair Vote study](#) said both candidates and voters who are people of color benefit from RCV. WDC has continued to endorse versions of this bill since the 2019 legislative session. Yet despite the support of the entire Montgomery County Council and the county legislative delegation, it has never made it to a floor vote in the Maryland General Assembly.

RCV has grass roots support in Montgomery County— the League of Women Voters, Do the Most Good, Sierra Club, and Our Revolution are among the groups supporting RCV. The bill calls for an education campaign to fully inform voters about how it will work. The Arlington County, VA County Board voted to use RCV in its June 2023 primary elections and has developed a voter education model that would be highly adaptable for Montgomery County. We hope you will give our county voters, and your constituents, the chance we deserve to advance democracy in the next election.

We ask for your support for HB 344 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Respectfully,

Diana E. Conway
WDC President