

House Bill 0344
FAVORABLE
Montgomery County – Voting Methods MC 03–23
Ways and Means Committee, Maryland House of Delegates
February 3, 2023

Submitted by Seth Grimes, Takoma Park, Maryland

Chair Atterbeary, Ways and Means Committee members, I respectfully communicate my support for HB 344, Authorizing the Montgomery County Council to adopt a ranked choice voting (RCV) method for elections for certain local offices.

My name is Seth Grimes. I am a former member of the Takoma Park City Council and a current member of the Montgomery County Democratic Central Committee.

The City of Takoma Park has applied ranked choice voting in municipal elections starting in 2007. This was after eighty-four percent of voters approved of RCV in a 2005 advisory referendum.

RCV has served Takoma Park well. An instant runoff decided the 2014 city-council race that elected our former mayor, Kate Stewart, to office, and RCV came into play this last November in several of our ward council races. In no case did the winning candidate receive a majority of votes. Second-choice votes put the winners over the top, ensuring that the winning candidates were the ones with the most overall support.

I have observed numerous Montgomery County Council, Board of Education, and other primary elections where one (or more, in the case of at-large races) of the Democratic nominees will not be a voter-majority first choice. RCV would ensure that the winners have the most overall support, just as it did in the Takoma Park races I mentioned.

RCV has worked locally, and it will work more broadly in Montgomery County, ensuring that minority voter voices are heard and not discouraged. Of course, many other jurisdictions have adopted RCV. The states of Maine and Alaska apply RCV state-wide, a step Maryland should consider in the future.

Finally, I note that HB 344 is enabling legislation. The bill would allow Montgomery County to adopt ranked choice voting. RCV is a great option for Montgomery County, sponsored by our delegation, and I look forward to very lively debate about merits and mechanisms when a bill implementing RCV comes before the County Council.

I urge a favorable committee report and General Assembly enactment of HB 344.

Seth Grimes

7300 Willow Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
seth.grimes@gmail.com