Thank you for this opportunity to testify on "Montgomery County – Voting Methods MC 03–23." My name is Amy Waychoff and I have lived in Montgomery County for 35 years.

There is not a lot of data about the effectiveness of RCV. However, one study in 2014 documented a problem called ballot "exhaustion," whereby ballots are discarded in the second and subsequent rounds. This phenomenon happens, for example, when the voter marks only one or two candidates. The study concluded that RCV "does not ensure that the winning candidate will have received a majority of all votes cast, only a majority of all valid votes in the final round of tallying." For example, Tony Santos, mayor of San Leandro, California, lost his re-election bid in 2010 due to RCV. After the first round, Santos led, but only with 36 percent of the vote. After six rounds, "the winner had 51 percent to Santos' 49 percent of the remaining vote. The winner held a majority over Santos but his share of the total votes cast was 46 percent, not a majority."*

There is also a lack of elemental fairness in RCV. Let's say that the candidate you placed in the first spot on your ballot received the lowest amount of overall votes, and was therefore scratched from every ballot. Under RCV, your second choice candidate is then turned into your top choice. It's as if you are given a second vote. Why should someone who voted for the most unpopular candidate in the first round get to influence the final election?

RCV is expensive. According to the Fiscal and Policy Note for HB 344, the other Montgomery County bill dealing with RCV, FY 2024 costs have been estimated at a whopping $2 million in Montgomery County alone: voting machines need to be configured with the proper software to implement RCV, and a large public information campaign must be undertaken because the system is so confusing. It would be more cost effective to hold a separate runoff election if the state wants to make sure the ultimate winner has a majority as opposed to a plurality of the vote. In a traditional runoff, everyone knows who the candidates are and has an equal voice in the outcome.

It is generally accepted that the higher the voter turnout, the more legitimate the election results. However, RCV is so confusing and convoluted that it would most likely lower turnout. Furthermore, research on decision-making has shown that as the number of choices increases, so does the individuals' difficulty in making decisions.

If one party is in the minority and only has one person on the ballot for a particular office, then that party would have to do a major education campaign to encourage its voters to "bullet vote," which means voting only for one person on the ballot; otherwise the minority party would be giving the majority party an even greater chance of placing one of its candidates as the ultimate winner.

RCV encourages back-room deals, where two candidates have its supporters promise to vote for the other candidate as their second choice. Three years ago, the California state legislature voted for RCV, but Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed the bill (SB 212): The Governor explained the reasons for his veto as follows: "Where it has been implemented, I am concerned that it has often led to voter confusion, and that the promise that ranked choice voting leads to greater democracy is not necessarily fulfilled." Like the Governor, I believe that RCV requires much more study before it is used more widely. Therefore, please give HB 344 an unfavorable report.

*Craig M. Burnett, Vladimir Kogan, "Ballot (and voter) 'exhaustion' under Instant Runoff Voting: An examination of four ranked-choice elections," Elsevier: Electoral Studies, Volume 37, March 2015.