



February 7, 2023
Testimony in Support of HB 344 –
Montgomery County – Voting Methods

Get Money Out – Maryland
Baltimore County Progressive Democrats Club
Baltimore Nonviolence Center
Be the Change Bmore
Caucus of African American Leaders of Anne Arundel
Chesapeake Climate Action Network
Common Cause Maryland
Don't Shop on Tuesdays
Do the Most Good
Indivisible Central Maryland
Indivisible Howard County
Indivisible Montgomery
Indivisible Worcester
J Walkers Action Group
League of Women Voters of Baltimore City
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Maryland Peace Action
Maryland Poor People's Campaign
Maryland United for Peace and Justice
Matthew Henson Community Development Center
National Association of Social Workers - Maryland
Our Revolution Maryland
Progressive Maryland
Randallstown Branch NAACP
Represent Maryland
Represent.US
St. Ignatius Justice & Peace Committee
Southwest Baltimore County Democratic Club
WISE –Women Indivisible Strong Effective

For the People – Maryland is a coalition of nonprofit organizations. We promote equal access to the ballot—as a voter or candidate—for all citizens regardless of race, ethnicity, or party affiliation. We believe that big money in politics must be eliminated, and the influence of concentrated wealth reduced.

To advance these goals, we strongly support HB 344. It builds on the success of the General Assembly, [HB 1499](#) (2013), which authorized public campaign finance systems that have proven highly successful in Montgomery and Howard counties, and which are being implemented in several other jurisdictions. HB 344 will provide a test case in Montgomery County for ranked choice voting, an increasingly implemented and promising election system.

HB 344, authorizing Montgomery County to initiate ranked choice voting or an approval voting method, would similarly encourage greater voter participation. By requiring a majority of votes cast to win public office, rather than the current winner-take-all system, it would nurture a culture of consensus.

Adopted in states and communities across the country, ranked choice voting has been chosen for state primary, congressional, and presidential elections in Alaska and Maine. It has also been approved for local elections in more than 20 U.S. cities, from Cambridge, Massachusetts and New York (including its five boroughs) to San Francisco and Takoma Park, Maryland.

The model of San Francisco demonstrates how ranked choice voting can enhance public engagement. The city is comparable in size to Montgomery County, which has 27% more registered voters (686,785 versus 498,197 in 2022).

- Since San Francisco introduced ranked choice voting in 2004, its number of registered voters has climbed from 448,948 to 501,860, a 12% increase.
- In the 2022 gubernatorial elections, turnout of registered voters in Montgomery County was 51%¹ — almost identical to San Francisco’s 50.08% in 2002 — the election before its system was changed to ranked choice voting.
- In San Francisco’s 2022 midterms, turnout soared from 50.08% to 62.32%, a 24% increase.

There are additional reasons to support ranked choice voting:

- Under the current winner-take-all system, elections that include more than two candidates create the strong possibility of a candidate winning without a majority of the votes cast. That makes governing difficult for the official elected, who lacks a clear mandate for his or her policies.
- The current election system often prevents voters from choosing their preferred candidate for fear of “splitting the vote” among those who generally support the same ideology and policies, allowing a candidate they oppose to win the race. Ranked choice voting would nullify this “spoiler” effect.
- It would also give candidates an incentive to avoid “negative” campaigning. Instead of bashing an opponent, a candidate would be more inclined to court that opponent’s supporters in hopes of garnering their second-choice votes.

Most importantly, ranked choice voting would give citizens a greater stake in elections. By assigning an order to favored candidates, they would have a greater sense that their votes make a difference. And when a majority of votes cast is needed to win, rather than the current winner-take-all system, they would feel part of a more truly representative democracy.

Elected officials in Montgomery County have expressed interest in an alternative voting system, and the General Assembly should exercise leadership as it did in 2013 to improve our electoral system.

We urge the Ways and Means Committee to issue a favorable report for HB 344.

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¹ https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabPDF/4-GeVoterTOGrid_Map.pdf