



Ella Ennis, Legislative Chairman
Maryland Federation of Republican Women
PO Box 6040, Annapolis MD 21401
Email: eee437@comcast.net

The Honorable Vanessa Atterbeary, Chairman
And Members of the Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: **HB 334** – Ranked Choice Voting and Inclusion of City of Takoma Park Municipal Elections on the State Ballot (MC 7-23) -- **OPPOSED**

Dear Chairman Atterbeary and Members,

The Maryland Federation of Republican Women strongly opposes HB 334 that mandates that the State Board of Elections may not certify a voting system unless the State Board determines that the voting system is “capable of tabulating ballots cast in an election conducted using Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) without the necessity of modifying or upgrading the voting system to achieve that capability.” Clearly, HB 334 is affecting all voting systems for the State of Maryland. While this is titled as a Montgomery County local bill, it sets several precedents for the entire state. It requires that any voting system in the state must be capable of tabulating ballots cast in an election conducted using RCV. Why would every vote tabulation machine and software for the entire state need to be Ranked Choice Voting capable unless the plan is for all counties to use RCV?

HB 334 would allow Takoma Park to request to have its municipal elections on the State Ballot. This means that the municipal offices would appear on the same ballot as county, state and federal elected offices appear. Ten municipalities in Maryland, including Takoma Park, allow non-citizens to register and vote in their municipal elections. It is totally unacceptable for a municipal election that allows non-citizens to vote be included on the same ballot as county, state and federal offices and non-partisan Board of Education offices. Inclusion would require a blending of the voter registration lists.

Ranked Choice Voting will introduce a complex system of voting that will be difficult for voters to understand. Ranked Choice Voting is confusing to voters. It will take extra time for each voter to make 3 choices for each office. It will require an extensive and costly education program for voters to learn about the process. HB 334 admits that RCV will increase the time needed to vote: *Additional voting machines for the Montgomery County Board to deploy to Takoma Park to mitigate additional time added to the voting process by Ranked Choice Voting; and independent software to tabulate RCV results for the City of Takoma Park’s Municipal Elections.* This means that HB 334 requires the taxpayers of Maryland and Montgomery County to pay for the costs for Takoma Park to implement Ranked Choice Voting; and the city of Takoma Park does not have to reimburse the state or Montgomery County for its costs.



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The fiscal note for HB 334 is not yet available, but last year HB 362 – Voting Systems RCV said that the cost to implement Ranked Choice Voting in Montgomery County was about \$250,000 from the Maryland General Fund and about \$2 million from Montgomery County and in following fiscal years. If it will cost \$2 million to provide voting tabulators and marking devices and software, what will it cost to convert or buy new equipment and software for the entire State?

Multiple changes in the election process cause confusion for voters, undermine their confidence in the process, and increases the distrust in election results. A brief review of the Maryland State Board of Elections Turnout Reports for 2022 and 2018 indicate that there was a 10% overall decline in the number of voters voting in the 2022 elections from 2018. Six Maryland counties experienced a drop off rate between 10% and 15%. We need stability in our elections.

For all of these reasons we most urgently request that the Committee vote an **Unfavorable** Report for **HB 334**.

Sincerely,
Ella
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