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Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee

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SB383: Ranked Choice Voting
Senate Education, Energy, & the Environment Committee
Wednesday, February 26, 2025 1:00 PM

Our current "choose-one" election system frequently denies voters options and encourages negative campaigning. Strategic voting often prevails to avoid "wasting" votes on less competitive candidates. In primary elections, those who win with a plurality of votes perform worse in general elections than those who win with a majority-- a phenomenon that is created under the current system. Electoral reforms are needed to increase representation and enhance the integrity of the democratic process.

Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), also known as Instant Runoff Voting (IRV), allows voters to select the candidates in order of preference. If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, that person wins. If there is no majority winner after counting first choices, the race is decided by an "instant runoff." The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and votes for that candidate are reallocated to each voter's second choice. This process continues until one candidate earns a majority.

SB383 would allow the State Board of Elections (SBE) to use IRV beginning with the 2028 Presidential Primary Election. They would be required to create an educational campaign and share it with Local Boards of Elections free of charge. Political parties and individual candidates would also educate the public. A post-election report created by the SBE, due in January 2029, would include a review of IRV as used in the 2028 Presidential Primary and make recommendations regarding its use in future elections. Additionally, SB383 allows the SBE to set standards, certify election-related technology, and regularly review and evaluate its performance.

IRV empowers voters by creating a system in which victory requires broad support. This motivates positive campaigning, encourages civility, and enhances cooperation among candidates. When NYC implemented IRV in 2021, the mayoral primary election had the highest voter turnout in over 30 years. According to FairVote, this method also improves representation for underrepresented communities.

IRV is widely used and tested. Our neighbors in Arlington, Virginia and Washington D.C. have employed this system. Takoma Park, MD has been using it for nearly 20 years. This voting

method is also used in Australia, Alaska, Maine, and many jurisdictions around the country.[1] IRV has been adopted in both parties-- it has been used in Democratic Presidential Primaries in Alaska, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, Nevada, and Wyoming, and Republican Party elections or conventions in Virginia and Indiana. Pennsylvania, Delaware, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Oklahoma Democrats have used this method in Party elections or conventions, and both parties in Utah already use this system.

Now is the time for Maryland to embrace IRV as many others already have. This voting system embodies the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and empowerment that lie at the heart of a vibrant democracy.

I urge a favorable report on SB383.

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[1] AK; Albany, CA; Arden, DE; Arlington, VA; Basalt, CO; Benton County, OR; Berkeley, CA; Bloomington, MN; Bluffdale, UT; Boulder, CO; Broomfield, CO; Burlington, VT; Cambridge, MA; Carbondale, CO; Corvallis, OR; Cottonwood Heights, UT; Draper City, UT; Easthampton, MA; Elk Ridge, UT; Genola, UT; Goshen, UT; Heber City, UT; Las Cruces, NM; Lehi, UT; Magna, UT; Maine; Midvale, UT; Millcreek, UT; Minneapolis, MN; Minnetonka, MN; Moab, UT; New York City, NY; Newton, UT; Nibley, UT; Oakland, CA; Palm Desert, CA; Payson, UT; Portland, ME; River Heights, UT; Riverton, UT; Salt Lake City, UT; San Francisco, CA; San Leandro, CA; Sandy, UT; Santa Fe, NM; St. Louis Park, Minnesota; St. Paul, MN; South Salt Lake, UT; Springville, UT; Vineyard, UT; Washington, D.C.; Woodland, UT