
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 215
Elections - Ranked-Choice Voting in Contests for Presidential Nomination and
Certification of Election-Supporting Technology
Ways and Means Committee
January 28, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly supports HB 215, which would allow the State Board of Elections the option to use ranked-choice voting (RCV) to elect each political party's candidate for the office of president of the United States starting with the 2028 primary. If the State Board decides to implement RCV, it must do three things: develop and pay for a voter education campaign to inform Marylanders about it, share this campaign with the local boards, and submit a report to the Governor and the General Assembly by January 1, 2029, reviewing the use of ranked-choice voting and making recommendations for implementation and expansion in future elections.

Ranked-choice voting encourages voter participation. Low voter turnout persists in Maryland, with more than 2 million eligible voters sitting out since 2012.¹ A study last year highlighted that voters are 17% more likely to show up for municipal elections if they live in an RCV jurisdiction.² New York City saw a 36% increase in turnout after switching to RSV.² In San Francisco, their RCV mayoral contest had more voter participation when compared to the non-RCV contest for two higher offices – governor and U.S. senator.² RCV can similarly increase voter engagement in Maryland.

Ranked-choice voting gives voters more power and choice. Single-choice voting has strengthened the two-party system our forefathers warned us about. Our Constitution is built on popular sovereignty but our current voting structure undermines that concept. We have seen the way this discourages voters who feel stuck with two candidates, neither of whom they like very much. Voters become convinced they don't have a real say in who leads them. With RCV, we get a more complete picture of voter preferences. **Although RCV doesn't force voters to participate in ranking**, when given the option, **71% of voters choose to rank multiple candidates.**³

¹ Amanda Engel, *Lowest Voter Turnout In Over A Decade* (Maryland: WMAR, 2024)
<https://www.wmar2news.com/news/national-politics/america-votes/lowest-voter-turnout-in-over-a-decade>

² <https://fairvote.app.box.com/s/srd6c8ldpii7j94o9vkdxldcac3yjd30>

³ https://fairvote.org/resources/electoral-systems/ranked_choice_voting_vs_approval_voting/

Ranked-choice voting combats polarization and encourages diversity in candidates by removing the risk of splitting the party or “wasting your vote”. Maryland had a total of 100,207 write-ins for president during the most recent election – an increase of almost 25,000 when compared to 2020.⁴ This showcases over 100,000 voters who were brave enough to reject our current system, which pushes them to vote for the “lesser of two evils”; RCV would allow them to vote first for a candidate with whom they align and in whom they believe without the fear that their vote will benefit the candidate they support the least.

Ranked-choice voting encourages candidates to engage with all voters in hopes of earning higher rankings even among groups typically left off their campaign trail. In RCV elections, 73% of voters had the eventual winner ranked in their top three, which displays strong mandates for the winners.⁵ **Winners are therefore more highly accepted by the populous.**

Ranked-choice voting is simple and preferred by most voters.⁶ RCV has been used for over 100 years, and over 50 jurisdictions in the U.S. currently use RCV.⁶ Four states have already used RCV in their presidential primaries and exit polling has revealed that RCV voters prefer it to their past voting structure.⁵ RCV ballot error rates are comparable to or less than current election processes.^{5,6} Perhaps unsurprisingly, proposals to implement RCV have been approved in 27 city ballot measures in a row.⁶

HB 215 allows the State Board to utilize ranked-choice voting, and ensures that voters feel confident going into the polling booth. Voting is our most sacred democratic process, and anything we can do to make the system more robust, the candidates more diverse, and the voters more engaged should be supported;⁶ for this reason **Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on HB215.**

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁴ https://elections.maryland.gov/elections/2024/General_Results/gen_results_2024_1.html

⁵ https://fairvote.org/resources/electoral-systems/ranked_choice_voting_vs_approval_voting/

⁶ <https://fairvote.app.box.com/s/srd6c8ldpii7j94o9vkdxdldcac3yjd30>

Appendix

