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Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary, Chairman
and Members of the Ways and Means Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Annapolis, Maryland

RE: **HB 1094** -- Montgomery County Voting Methods - Ranked Choice Voting - Approval Voting
OPPOSED

Dear Chairman Atterbeary and Committee Members,

The Maryland Federation of Republican Women strongly opposes HB1094 because Ranked Choice Voting is confusing and manipulative, and Approval Voting degrades the sacred duty of voting for our elected officials to a popularity contest.

This legislation could set a statewide precedent for changing the method of voting, not just for local offices but for all elected offices. It will confuse voters, undermine confidence in the election process, and make people question election results.

Millions of voters around the country voted against Ranked Choice Voting initiatives in the 2024 election -- Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, and Oregon. Ranked Choice Voting had already been banned in 5 additional states — Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, South Dakota, Tennessee.

Ranked Choice Voting will introduce a **complex** system of voting that will be **difficult for voters to understand**. The Fiscal Note for HB1094 is not yet available. However, the Fiscal Note for the 2024 Ranked Choice Voting bill (HB0423) estimated a **cost** of \$1.1 million in Montgomery County funds and \$184,000 in State general funds in FY2027 to implement Ranked Choice Voting just in Montgomery County for the 2026 election. Annual costs for FY2026–2027 were estimated to be about \$273,000 in State general funds. An **extensive and costly education program** will be required to get Montgomery County's approximately 700K registered voters comfortable with the process. The 2024 fiscal note did not include a projected cost to Montgomery County to develop and implement an education program to inform all County voters about RCV.

The more candidates and positions involved, the more **cumbersome and tedious** the process. Voters will need much longer to make 3 choices for each position on the ballot. Some election day voters are likely to walk away from the polls if the line is too long or moving too slowly. Mailed ballot voters will have no one present to explain the new, complicated process. Voters exasperated with the complicated and burdensome RCV ballot may skip down-ballot local races. Statistics already show a decrease in the number of votes cast in those very important down-ballot races, including school board races.



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RCV will complicate and **slow the process of counting votes and certifying election results**. RCV requires complex and confusing formulas for calculating votes that will **undermine the public's confidence** in the election results. A jurisdiction's inability to open and close polls on time or to promptly calculate and certify election results will have a negative impact on the entire state.

HB1094 grants the Montgomery County Council a blank slate to set the process and rules for electing judicial as well as legislative offices in the County. It gives the County Council the authority to adopt a local law that provides the ballot format, procedures for tabulating votes, and any other provision necessary to implement Ranked Choice Voting or Approval Voting. "Any other provision necessary" is too broad and raises the possibility that the County Council could implement **voting by non-citizens**. The city of Takoma Park and several other Montgomery County municipalities have already expanded the vote to allow non-citizens to participate in their municipal elections.

The Maryland General Assembly has made numerous changes to election law and the voting process in recent years (Early Voting, Mail-In Voting, Drop Off Boxes, Same Day Voter Registration and Voting, etc.). Election turnout does not reflect the projected benefits of these changes. Rather, a review of the Maryland State Board of Elections' Official Turnout Reports shows that, in the statewide 2022 General Election, voter turnout was down 10 percent statewide from the 2018 General Election.

The decrease in voter turnout (2018 vs 2022) was greatest in Maryland's largest counties, where turnout dropped 10 to 15 percent:

	% Drop Off in Voting
Prince George's County	15%
Charles County	13%
Montgomery County	12%
Baltimore City	11%
Baltimore County	10%
Howard County	10%

Let's not replace our democratic process – a majority picks the winner – with RCV. A process of elimination rounds to finally reach a majority vote for a single candidate may work in a setting where everyone is in the room and can make an informed decision among the candidates in succeeding rounds, but that same **opportunity for an informed vote does not exist with RCV** when all choices must be made before the first (or succeeding) round results are known.

For all of these reasons, please vote an **UNFAVORABLE** report on **HB1094**.

Sincerely,
Ella Ennis
Legislative Chairman
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