

BILL NUMBER HB 1094

BILL TITLE: Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 9-25

POSITION: Favorable



February 20, 2025

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1094

To the Honorable Chair Vanessa Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Members of the Ways & Means Committee:

On behalf of the thousands of ranked choice voting (RCV) advocates in the RCV Maryland coalition, we offer our support of HB 1094 to allow Montgomery County to expand the voting methods available for local county elections. We thank lead sponsor Delegate Kaufman and the entire Montgomery County Delegation for advancing this legislation.

We can all agree that every voter should feel empowered and confident that their voice is heard in an election. While we make decisions based on choices, we are limited in how we express our preferences in elections. The limitations in how we vote create split votes, non-majority winners, and voters continuing to feel like their voice doesn't matter.

We believe every voice should be heard and that is why ranked choice voting is a smart, innovative, and proven voting method to give voters a stronger voice.

Voters Get It. Ranked choice voting taps into what we do on a regular basis - make choices based on the options we have. Voters rank candidates in order of preference (first choice, second, choice, and so on). A voter can rank as many or as few candidates as they like. The City of Minneapolis' 2017 post-election voter survey showed that 92% of voters found ranking their preferences simple to do.¹ Additional exit surveys with voters in Utah and California show voters have high support and confidence with ranked choice voting.²

Candidates Get It. A candidate must earn the broadest support to win. After counting first choices, if no candidate has a majority the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The voter's vote carries forward to their next choice. The round-by-round elimination continues until you have a winner. This process creates more civil campaigns and focuses on community issues, not personal attacks. The recent 2024 election in Portland, Oregon highlights how a civil campaign works for all candidates and creates more collaboration, coalition building and cross endorsements.³

¹ 2017 Minneapolis Municipal Assessment

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1DJtTWGBYs-3c_omlLQSiDK6KSo0a7hWg

² New surveys: Voters love ranked choice voting <https://fairvote.org/new-surveys-voters-love-ranked-choice-voting/>

³ Ranked choice voting debuts in Portland: Vast majority ranked their ballots and elected a candidate of choice <https://fairvote.org/ranked-choice-voting-debuts-in-portland-vast-majority-ranked-their-ballots-and-elected-a-candidate-of-choice/>

BILL NUMBER HB 1094

BILL TITLE: Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 9-25

POSITION: Favorable



Ranked Choice Voting is Expanding. Ranked choice voting is used in Takoma Park (since 2007) and over 50 jurisdictions across the U.S., including Maine (statewide), Alaska, Washington D.C., New York City, San Francisco, and Minneapolis.

Ten years ago the Montgomery County Right to Vote Task Force recommended the County Council include ranked choice voting as a key change to local elections. The County was not able to act on this recommendation because it lacks the ability to innovate without the General Assembly's action first.

Maryland is Ready. State Board of Elections (SBE) Administration Jared DeMarinis provided information on the State's voting equipment readiness for ranked choice voting. Current election equipment can produce and scan a ranked ballot, along with collecting data. While the current system cannot tabulate results, it is possible to complete RCV tabulation of the cast vote record (CVR) by either requesting this functionality from the current voting system vendor or using federally tested, open-source software, such as RCTab.⁴

An Important First Step. While HB 1094 does not mandate the use of a new voting method, the bill is an important first step for Montgomery County to be able to determine the system that works best for their needs. Advocates and community leaders are well equipped to successfully evaluate and implement new voting methods. The unanimous support from the Montgomery County Delegation and the Montgomery County Council demonstrates the steadfast commitment for better voting methods in the county.

We urge the Ways & Means Committee to give HB 1094 full consideration and a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle Whittaker".

Michelle Whittaker
Executive Director
Ranked Choice Voting Maryland

⁴ Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center, "RCTab Tabulation Software," <https://www.rcvresources.org/rctab>