



Maryland Forward Party

February 24, 2025

Maryland Forward Party

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HB 1094:

Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 9-25

Dear Committee,

Maryland Forward Party urges your support for HB 1094, Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 9-25. We believe the time is right to advance this enabling legislation for Montgomery County voters.

Montgomery County has embraced innovation and led the way on democracy reforms across the state. The County was the first jurisdiction to adopt public financing. The City of Rockville led the state in the use of all vote-by-mail elections. And Takoma Park has shown how ranked choice voting can be used to empower voters and elect candidates with clear and broad consensus.

Over the last 10 years, Montgomery County has passed term limits for elected office, implemented public financing, and expanded the number of seats on the County Council. Yet, the County has not been able to adjust its voting methods to adapt for these changes.

- Every Democratic Primary County Executive race has been won with less than a majority of the vote since 2014.
- In the 2018 Democratic Primary, one out of the five winners in district council races won with less than a majority of the vote.
- In the 2022 Democratic Primary, four out of the seven winners in district council races won with less than a majority of the vote.

This is not a commentary on the winner but on the way we vote. All of these contests featured more than two candidates – often more than five – and a very divided result. The lack of majority winners in these races (and others) is because Montgomery County voters are limited in a fundamental way – how they express their choices for elected office. Better voting methods are needed so Montgomery County can adapt and respond to the unique dynamics within its community. As the 2026 election cycle approaches, Montgomery County is likely to face another primary with multiple candidates vying for offices and voters with limited choice in selecting preferred candidates.

It is important to emphasize that HB 1094 is enabling legislation and will not mandate the use of any voting method. However, this gives the Montgomery County Board of Elections and County Council ample time to determine how best to implement a new voting method and when it will go into effect.



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Passage of this legislation will allow Montgomery County to leverage its people, systems, and expertise to ensure effective implementation and robust voter education. Here are three key reasons Montgomery Council is uniquely positioned to lead on this issue:

1. Local Experts & Ready Equipment

Montgomery County is fortunate to have local election administration experts on ranked choice voting in the City of Takoma Park. In addition, state voting equipment is RCV-capable. Maryland uses Election Systems & Software (ES&S) voting equipment and ranked ballots can be tabulated either by updating ES&S software or using federally-tested election supporting technology.

2. Access to Best Practices for Ballot Design, Implementation, and Administration

Ranked choice voting is used in over 50 jurisdictions across the United States. Montgomery County can utilize the expertise of election administrators in RCV-jurisdictions along with independent organizations, like the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center (RCVRC), that have developed guides, tabulation tools, and support for jurisdictions, most recently in New York City. Improved ballot design and best practices are available through the RCVRC, which has conducted independent usability tests.

3. Robust Voter Education

In any election, voter education is essential. We support the needs of the local Board of Election to develop training for election judges. In addition, robust voter education and outreach must be available to voters and candidates. The Ranked Choice Voting coalition includes the League of Women Voters, which has stated publicly its intention to support and engage in voter education.

In 2014, the Montgomery County Right to Vote Task Force recommended the County Council include ranked choice voting as a key change to local elections. Enabling legislation has been introduced since 2019 with unanimous support from the Montgomery County Delegation and the Montgomery County Council. Montgomery County has an opportunity to be an innovative leader in the state and provide additional insights in the region as more jurisdictions adopt and use ranked choice voting.

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

Respectfully

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