

Testimony in Opposition to HB 0580 – Montgomery County Voting Methods (MC 1- 26)

My name is Alice Harron and I am a Montgomery County resident. I urge you to oppose HB 0580 MC1-26. Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) creates confusion and distrust. I lived in Oakland, California, which has used RCV for mayoral elections since 2010. The problems with RCV when I lived there – and the concerns still raised today – show that Montgomery County should avoid RCV. As UC Berkeley public policy professor Dan Lindheim said during the run-up to Oakland’s special mayoral election last spring: “I would give it a D-minus... I don’t think, even after 14 or 15 years, that people understand it.”

[Source: Ramos, John. “Oakland voting for new mayor as ranked choice voting remains controversial,” CBS San Francisco, April 15, 2025.

https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/oakland-special-election-mayoral-race-2025/?utm_source]

Even Robert Ogilvie from FairVote — an organization that advocates for RCV — admitted in the same report, “I think there’s still some confusion. We could do a lot more education, especially in Oakland.”

Confusion breeds lack of faith in the outcome. Professor Lindheim also noted, “There’s sort of a crisis of legitimacy. People don’t really believe the person who won under ranked-choice voting deserved to win.”

Jean Quan, who won Oakland’s first mayoral election under RCV, credited her use of second-choice rankings for her victory. Her admission made me feel that the mechanics of RCV can determine election outcomes more than voters’ straightforward judgment of the candidates.

Adding to the unease, in last spring’s mayoral election, opposing candidates appeared together on campaign materials or talked about ranking other candidates. I shake my head at the incentives RCV creates for candidates to engage in these practices rather than simply stating their own case for a vote.

Across the political spectrum, we hear arguments about voter suppression or mistrust in voting systems. RCV adds another barrier: the time and attention required to understand the new system and then rank candidates. This burden functions – similar in effect, though not by intent – as literacy tests or other earlier historical voting barriers. Working-class voters, people juggling multiple jobs, and others without a lot of time are the ones most likely to be discouraged.

As a Marylander who has returned to her home, I ask that you do not send Montgomery County into a similar Oakland election quagmire of confusion and distrust. Our voting process should remain straightforward and accessible. Please issue an Unfavorable Report on HB 0580..