



February 16, 2026

Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

House Bill 580 - Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 1-26 - FAV

Dear Government, Labor, and Elections Committee Members:

My name is Alana Persson, and I serve as Communications Lead for RepresentWomen, a national, nonpartisan nonprofit that has spent more than a decade tracking the systems and structural levers that increase women's representation in elected office.

We are writing today to support HB 580 because it ensures that as Montgomery County's elections grow more competitive, decisive contests reflect broad voter support and emerging candidates are not structurally disadvantaged by vote-splitting dynamics.

Montgomery County's elections are strong today. Women are well represented, and the County has led the state in democratic innovation. This bill is not about correcting failure. It is about preserving legitimacy and fairness as candidate fields expand.

Majority Support in Decisive Primaries

Since 2014, every Democratic primary for County Executive has been won with less than a majority of the vote. In 2022, four out of seven primary winners in district races were elected without majority support.

In Montgomery County, where primaries often determine the ultimate officeholder, plurality voting allows candidates to prevail with 35–45 percent of the vote in crowded fields. That means a candidate can win despite most voters supporting someone else.

Ranked-choice voting addresses that directly in single-seat races. By allowing voters to rank candidates and transferring preferences until one candidate secures majority support, it ensures that winners reflect broad backing rather than simple plurality advantage.



As we look toward competitive 2026 primaries for County Council and County Executive, this structural safeguard becomes increasingly important.

Protecting Fair Competition and Representation

Plurality systems create strategic pressure when multiple candidates appeal to similar constituencies. Candidates who share support bases — including women candidates — may hesitate to run simultaneously for fear of splitting the vote. This dynamic can limit competition and narrow voter choice before ballots are even cast.

Ranked-choice voting reduces that structural deterrent. It allows voters to support aligned candidates without penalty and encourages campaigns to build broader coalitions rather than consolidate power early through strategic withdrawals.

From a representation standpoint, systems matter. Our research shows that ranked-choice voting jurisdictions consistently elect women at higher rates than plurality systems, in part because the structural barriers of vote-splitting are reduced.

A Forward-Looking Reform

HB 580 does not mandate change. It grants Montgomery County the authority to adopt a voting method that preserves majority legitimacy in decisive single-seat contests and more fully reflects voter preferences in multi-seat races.

As elections evolve and candidate fields expand, structural clarity becomes more important — not less. This bill ensures that Montgomery County has the tools to maintain broad voter support, healthy competition, and representative outcomes.

For these reasons, RepresentWomen respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 580.

Sincerely,
Alana Persson

Submitted by:
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