



1411 K Street N.W.
Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005
202-525-5717

Free Markets. Real Solutions.
www.rstreet.org

Testimony from:
Dr. Jonathan Madison, Governance Fellow, R Street Institute

In SUPPORT of House Bill 580, “AN ACT concerning Montgomery County – Voting Methods”

February 18, 2026

House Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

Chairwoman Wells and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Jonathan Madison, and I am a governance fellow at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy analysis and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, including election administration and reform. This is why we are supportive of HB 580.

This bill authorizes the Montgomery County Council to adopt, by local law, a ranked choice voting or approval voting method for certain local offices, including the county executive, county council, judges of the circuit court, state’s attorney, register of wills, sheriff, and members of the board of education. It also allows the council to set ballot formats, tabulation procedures, and related implementation details, and requires an educational campaign to inform voters about how these methods work. This is a local option bill, and nothing in HB 580 mandates that Montgomery County adopt these reforms, but it gives local officials the flexibility to choose methods that best reflect their preferences and improve how elections are conducted.

Ranked-choice voting (RCV) has been successfully used in jurisdictions across the country to allow voters to better express their choices and to ensure that the winners have broad support from the electorate. By requiring a majority to win, RCV prevents candidates from winning with a small plurality, encourages positive campaigning and coalition building, and engenders greater legitimacy for the eventual winner.ⁱ Our research shows that voters understand how RCV works and leverage the opportunity to rank candidates.ⁱⁱ Maryland residents in other localities have also demonstrated support for the use of RCV.ⁱⁱⁱ

HB 580 is also thoughtfully structured to ensure that any adoption of RCV or approval voting is accompanied by voter education and clear procedural standards, which are essential for a

smooth transition. By enabling Montgomery County to experiment with alternative voting methods while maintaining safeguards and public outreach, this bill supports democratic innovation at the local level. For these reasons, we encourage a favorable report of HB 580.

Thank you,

Dr. Jonathan Madison
Governance Fellow
R Street Institute
385-500-7537
jmadison@rstreet.org

ⁱ Jonathan Madison, “R Street on RCV,” *R Street Institute*, February 3, 2026, <https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/r-street-on-rcv/>.

ⁱⁱ Matt Germer, *An Analysis of Ranked Choice Voting in Maine* (R Street Institute, 2021), <https://www.rstreet.org/research/an-analysis-of-ranked-choice-voting-in-maine/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew Oberstaedt and Avram Reisman, “Greenbelt, MD Voters Approve Ranked Choice Voting,” *FairVote*, November 5, 2025, <https://fairvote.org/greenbelt-md-voters-approve-ranked-choice-voting/>.