



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

KATE STEWART
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 4

February 16, 2026

POSITION OF Councilmember Kate Stewart, District 4: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 580 - Montgomery County - Voting Methods

My name is Kate Stewart and I am the District 4 Councilmember for the Montgomery County Council, representing North Bethesda, Garrett Park, Kensington, parts of Chevy Chase, Takoma Park and Silver Spring. I chair the Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee for the Council which includes policy oversight for election law in Montgomery County. In addition, I am the immediate past Mayor of Takoma Park where I served residents for seven years.

Today I speak not for the entire Council but as a member who has a unique and in-depth understanding of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), currently practiced by Takoma Park in city elections. And, while I am not here officially testifying on behalf of my colleagues, I will note the Council voted to support HB 580 / MC 1-26 at the Council Session on February 9, 2026, and the Montgomery County Council has supported similar RCV enabling legislation for a number of years.

First adopted in 2006 in the City of Takoma Park, RCV was first implemented in the 2007 Takoma Park municipal election. In Takoma Park, ranked choice voting has been extremely successful. During City elections in 2012 and 2014 the organization FairVote conducted exit polls and large majorities reported understanding rank choice voting and did not have any problems casting their votes.

We also have found the process to run incredibly smoothly, where virtually no extra time is needed to determine election outcomes. In addition, the City's Board of Elections has reported few errors due to ranked choice voting and that most voters understand the concept of ranking candidates.

FairVote notes on their website that as of February 2026, RCV is used across the country in 48 jurisdictions that are home to over 14 million voters. That includes 2 states, 3 counties, and numerous cities. While the option to have RCV at the city level has been successful, the County requires similar

enabling legislation. HB 580 enjoys the unanimous support of the Montgomery County delegation and many leaders, community organizations and residents in Montgomery County.

For Montgomery County residents, the opportunity to include Ranked Choice Voting has many benefits:

- Voters can vote for who they really want instead of undervoting or bullet voting. Candidates with strong support backed by the majority of voters are elected.
- Voters have a sense of purpose and have more enthusiasm which leads to greater turn out. They can vote for their top choice and have back up choices, giving voters more control of the outcome.
- Women and candidates of color have more opportunities to be elected resulting in more representative and inclusive outcomes.
- Candidates are more civil to one another which elevates public discourse on critical issues.
- Since 2014, every Democratic Primary County Executive race in Montgomery County has been won with less than a majority of the vote.
- In 2022, 4 out of 7 Primary winners in district races won with less than a majority.

This enabling legislation will give Montgomery County the ability to choose the best solution for their community. **I urge the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee to give HB 580 full consideration and a favorable report.**