

JEN TERRASA  
Legislative District 13  
Howard County

Government, Labor, and  
Elections Committee

*Subcommittees*

Election Law

Labor

Oversight Committee on Personnel



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 217  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3246  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3246  
Jen.Terrasa@house.maryland.gov

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 25, 2026

To: The Honorable Melissa Wells  
Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

From: Delegate Jen Terrasa  
District 13, Howard County

Re: Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB 1289 Task Force on the  
Implementation of Approval Voting and Ranked-Choice Voting

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Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB 1289, which establishes the Task Force on the Implementation of Approval Voting and Ranked-Choice Voting to investigate alternative voting methods for state elections. This is a cross-file of SB 800 sponsored by Senator Mike McKay.

### **Background**

Given recent controversy over elections on the national level, many Marylanders are concerned about the effectiveness of our voting systems and their ability to properly reflect constituent preferences. Approval voting and ranked-choice voting methods specifically have been advocated for by different individuals and groups in Maryland. Some local elections in Maryland currently use rank-choice voting, as do many other jurisdictions throughout the United States.

Approval voting is a method that has each person vote for as many candidates as they "approve of." In other words, voters select on their ballot all the candidates whom they would find acceptable in a given elected position. The candidate that receives the most "approvals" is the winner.

Ranked-choice voting is a method where voters rank all candidates in order of preference, rather than voting for just one. The winner of the vote will be determined based on which candidate receives the majority (over 50%) of votes. In the event that no candidate gets over 50% of votes based on voters' first choices, the winner will be

determined using an “instant runoff.” The candidate that received the least amount of first-choice votes will be eliminated, and voters who ranked that candidate first will have their second choice counted instead. The process of elimination will continue until a candidate has over 50% of votes. Ranked choice voting ensures that every person has one vote throughout the process. Voters can choose how many candidates they decide to rank.

## **The Bill**

The task force established by HB 1289 will investigate the two voting methods mentioned above, approval and ranked choice, for potential implementation in state-level elections. The task force will deliver the results of its investigation in December of 2026, which will include recommendations for legislation proposals in the 2027 regular session.

The following factors will be considered by the task force to develop recommendations:

- Use of these voting methods in other U.S. states and local jurisdictions.
- Potential administrative and fiscal impacts on state and local election boards.
- Potential impacts on voter participation, voter understanding, election outcomes, and representation.
- Constitutional and legal aspects of implementation.
- Statutory and regulatory changes that would be needed for implementation.

The purpose of this bill is to study the approval and ranked choice voting methods, and gain insight into any potential benefits to the state of Maryland and its democracy. The task force will inform its findings in part through examination of current voting in Maryland, on both state and local levels. However, the task force will *not* issue recommendations for voting systems on the county or municipality levels, instead only advising development of state-level elections. The work of the task force will not in any way interfere with a county or municipality’s evaluation and implementation of their own elections.

## **Conclusion**

It is in the best interest of Maryland to investigate different strategies to strengthen our democracy. With the current political polarization dividing the country, it is more important than ever that Marylanders trust the voting system and have confidence in their representatives. The task force established by HB 1289 is a step towards increasing Marylanders’ faith in their government and fortifying our democratic process.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1289.