



# MARYLAND FORWARD PARTY

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**BILL NO:** HB0580

**TITLE:** Montgomery County – Voting Methods MC 1-26

**COMMITTEE:** Government, Labor and Elections

**POSITION:** FAVORABLE

**DATE:** February 16, 2026

**TO:** Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee

**FROM:** Maryland Forward Party

**SUBJECT:** Supporting Community Choice In Election Methods

Maryland Forward Party urges your support for HB0580, Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 1-26. We believe the time is right to advance this enabling legislation and allow Montgomery County residents the right to choose how to run their own elections.

Montgomery County has embraced innovation and led the way on democracy reforms across the state. Over the last 10 years, Montgomery County has passed term limits for elected office; became the first county in the state to implement public election financing; and has expanded the number of seats on its County Council. The City of Rockville leads the state in the use of all vote-by-mail elections. Since 2007, Takoma Park has shown how ranked choice voting (RCV) can be used to empower voters and elect candidates with clear and broad consensus. Despite these reforms from the County and its municipalities, Montgomery County still fails to consistently elect winners who demonstrate broad consensus:

- Every Democratic Primary County Executive race has been won with less than a majority of the vote since 2014.
- In the 2018 Democratic Primary, one out of five winners (20%) in district council races won with less than a majority of the vote.
- In the 2022 Democratic Primary, four out of the seven winners (57%) in district council races won with less than a majority of the vote.

As the 2026 election cycle approaches, Montgomery County is likely to face more primary elections with multiple candidates vying for offices and voters with limited choice in selecting preferred candidates. Montgomery County should be allowed to adapt and respond to the unique dynamics within its community in its own way. It is important to emphasize that HB0580 is enabling legislation and will not mandate the use of any voting method. Rather, this bill merely gives the County Council



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and County Board of Elections the authority to determine how best to implement approval voting and/or RCV, including when (and if) any changes will go into effect.

If Montgomery County moves forward with changing its voting systems, passage of this legislation will allow the Board of Elections to leverage its people, systems, and expertise to ensure effective implementation and robust voter education. This Committee should have little concern that Montgomery County can effectively lead in implementation and voter education:

1. **Local Experts & Ready Equipment.** Montgomery County is fortunate to have local election administration experts on RCV already working in the City of Takoma Park. In addition, all state voting equipment is RCV-capable. Maryland uses Election Systems & Software (ES&S) voting equipment and ranked ballots can be tabulated either by updating ES&S software or using federally-tested election supporting technology.
2. **Access to Best Practices for Ballot Design, Implementation, and Administration.** RCV is already used in over 60 jurisdictions across the United States. Montgomery County can utilize the expertise of election administrators in RCV-jurisdictions along with independent organizations, like the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center (RCVRC), that have developed guides, tabulation tools, and support for jurisdictions, most recently in New York City. Improved ballot design and best practices are available through the RCVRC, which has conducted independent usability tests.
3. **Robust Voter Education.** With some education, Montgomery County voters are capable of adapting to new voting methods. We support the needs of the local Board of Election to develop training for election judges. Indeed, this bill as written provides for robust voter education and outreach to voters. Non-partisan organizations like the Ranked Choice Voting coalition are also available to assist and educate voters on changes to voting methods.

This enabling legislation has been introduced since 2019 with unanimous support from the Montgomery County Delegation and the Montgomery County Council. Montgomery County has an opportunity to be an innovative leader in the state and provide additional insights in the region as more jurisdictions consider and adopt different election systems. We urge the Committee to give HB0580 full consideration and a favorable report.

Sincerely,  
*Lee Bradshaw*  
**Legislative Committee Chair**  
Maryland Forward Party