



Testimony of Green Party of Montgomery County - In Support of HB 580

February 16, 2026

Maryland House of Delegates
Government, Labor, and Elections
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

Re: House Bill 580 - Montgomery County - Voting Methods MC 1-26

Written Testimony of Green Party of Montgomery County - In Support of HB 580

The Montgomery County Green Party supports HB 580 to authorize the Montgomery County Council to adopt either Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) or Approval Voting for Montgomery County offices. We believe that Ranked Choice Voting - in particular - offers a number of advantages over the traditional "first past the post" method currently in use throughout Maryland. In consequence, the Montgomery County Green Party has been working to bring RCV to voters over the past 20 years starting with our ultimately successful campaign in Takoma Park.

The benefits of RCV include: I) Ensuring the legitimacy of the victor in one-winner races - such as County Executive. II) More equitable representation for minority communities in legislative bodies. III) An end to the so-called spoiler effect. IV) Less negative campaigning - especially during primaries and greater voter involvement. These benefits are observed by comparing recent elections that did and did not employ RCV.

I. RCV Legitimizes the Winner.

In New York City's crowded Democratic primary for Mayor earlier this year, RCV proved that Zohran Mamdani was the preferred candidate of most Democrats and therefore legitimized him as the party's nominee. Despite multiple candidates, the primary was viewed as a contest between former Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mamdani. Mamdani did not command over 50% of the first place votes. But, as less popular candidates were eliminated, it became clear that most Democrats wanted Zohran rather than Andrew Cuomo to be the nominee. This allowed Zohran to consolidate Democratic

support and enter into the general election with a clear mandate from Democratic voters.

In New York City general elections, by contrast, RCV is not employed. Mamdani did ultimately command slightly more than 50% of the total votes cast. There was, however, a significant likelihood that none of the three remaining candidates - Mamdani, Cuomo, or Republican Curtis Sliwa - would have been the choice of a majority. Had Mamdani (or Cuomo) prevailed with less than 50% of the total vote, the “winner” would have been viewed as a pretender by many New Yorkers, including councilmembers, who supported the second place candidate. RCV obviates this concern.

Here at home, Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich has twice won primaries with well under 50% of the votes. By astute leadership and the support of ideologically compatible council members, he has managed to pursue a somewhat progressive agenda. But, without a clear mandate from the electorate, his ability to sway the legislature and “get things done” is limited.

With RCV in Montgomery County, a majority of voters could have expressed approval of Elrich’s agenda. Otherwise, a candidate who enjoyed greater support would have taken the reins. Regardless, the will of county residents would have clearly been effectuated.

II. RCV Ensures More Equitable Representation to Minority Communities in Multimember Districts.

The Montgomery County Council includes four at-large members who represent the entire county. Currently, in primaries and in the general election, Montgomery County voters can vote for up to four at-large candidates. This means that a large coherent voting bloc can elect all four even if a significant minority of voters would prefer others.

Were RCV employed, however, winners would need 20% + 1 of the total votes cast. Since a candidate wins with just over 1/5th of the vote, minority communities can rally behind a favorite and elect them. A majority of voters could elect two members. But minorities would also gain representation. Proportional representation is the hallmark of healthy democracies, and RCV would bring that feature to multi-member seats and reduce the chance that a minority would feel shut out of the County Council.

Indeed, the County Council's 2014 Right to Vote Task Force recommended the implementation of policies designed to result in more proportional representation in the Council. In contrast, Republicans in many states have gerrymandered districts to the point that in many states there are a disproportionately small number of Black legislators.

III. RCV Eliminates the Spoiler Effect.

As Greens, we are particularly sensitive to the charge that our candidates have taken votes from a candidate who might otherwise have prevailed. This charge has been levied in 2000 and 2016 when Republicans won the electoral college even though the Democratic nominee won a plurality of votes. With RCV, voters can choose the candidate that they like best and then rank acceptable choices in order of preference.

Thus, in addition to ensuring that candidates acceptable to the majority win, RCV allows voters to vote their conscience and increases the voices and viewpoints expressed in the political discourse. The current majority party in the state legislature, the Democrats, are more likely to stay in power with RCV than not, and keep majority support in the election outcomes.

IV. RCV Increases Voter Turnout and Interest by Increasing the Importance of Every Vote and Disincentivizing Negative Campaigning - Especially in Primaries. - and Generates Greater Voter Interest and Involvement.

Turnout in NYC Democratic primaries has increased significantly since RCV was first introduced in 2021 as the following table demonstrates:

RCV Improves Voter Turnout

Year	Winner	Incumbent	RCV	Turnout
2013	DeBlasio	No	No	20%
2017	DeBlasio	Yes	No	15%
2021	Adams	No	Yes	25%
2025	Mamdani	No	Yes	33%

There is thus good reason to believe that RCV will increase involvement by voters in local elections. This is very likely, at least in part, because in RCV elections more voters have a say in the final result.

In RCV one-office races with at least three names on the ballot, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and the second choice of their supporters receives the weakest candidate's votes. Thus voters who prefer less popular candidates still help

decide who wins. As disaffected voters realize this, they become motivated to get involved and go to the polls.

One factor that currently decreases turnout in “first past the post” elections is negative campaigning and advertising. Rather than campaign on a positive platform, candidates tear each other down. This negative campaigning disgusts voters, causes many to tune out, and is likely to harm the primary winners in the general election. With RCV, there is a real incentive to “play nice.” Aspirants don’t want to alienate voters who might rank them after their first choice. A great example of this occurred in San Francisco’s 2018 Special Mayor’s Election.

Two of the more progressive candidates - Mark Leno and Jane Kim - “teamed up” with each one urging their voters to rank the other second. Ultimately, moderate London Breed won because the majority of San Franciscans preferred her brand of politics. But, by campaigning jointly, the two more liberal candidates gave their supporters real hope that if progressives joined forces they could defeat the centrist Breed.

A similar dynamic occurred in the NYC primary earlier this year when Zohran Mamdani and Brad Lander jointly endorsed each other as their second choice. Although there was obvious rancor between Mamdani and Cuomo, the candidates also displayed a significant amount of camaraderie - which is what voters want. By contrast, the “first past the post” general election was marked by vituperation and negativity.

Conclusion

Implementing RCV in County elections would have a salutary effect on local democracy. It increases the legitimacy of elected officials, turnout, and voter interest. It also provides greater representation for groups and policies that enjoy significant, but not majority support. By eliminating the spoiler effect, it assures voters that they can rank their favorite first without increasing the likelihood that a despised candidate will win. Finally, RCV reduces hyper-negative campaigns and attack ads while energizing voters.

The Montgomery County Green Party strongly urges the Maryland House of Delegates to issue a favorable report on HB 580 which explicitly allows the Montgomery County Council to authorize either RCV or approval voting in Montgomery County. This reform is needed to increase fair representation of all eligible voters in the voting process.