



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of Montgomery County, MD, Inc.

**Statement to the Montgomery County Delegation for the
November 30, 2015 House Local Bills Hearing**

**Re: Local bill MC 2-16 Montgomery County Board of Education – Special
Election to Fill a Vacancy**

To: Members of the Montgomery County House Delegation in the General Assembly

From: Linna Barnes, President LWVMC

POSITION: Support with Amendment

As we did last year for bill MC 22-15, the League of Women Voters supports this measure to allow Montgomery County to hold special elections to fill vacancies in the Board of Education – and will suggest an amendment further below.

Consistent with our support for elections that reflect community sentiment and increase voter participation, we believe that allowing the voters to fill vacancies by election is preferable to reliance on appointment by incumbent office holders.

We note that the measure provides that the special election may be held concurrently with a general election. We support this provision as it will encourage voter participation and will also help to reduce the cost of conducting the special election.

We do not have a position with respect to the provision that would authorize the County Executive to determine the date of a special election, but clearly this authority must be vested in some official.

We support the provision that would allow a special election to be conducted by mail ballot as this would help to encourage voter participation and could also reduce the cost of conducting the election.

In addition, we encourage the delegation to consider supporting an amendment that would improve the bill. The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County supports the use of instant run-off voting to fill vacancies when special elections are held.



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Where more than two candidates are running for a single seat, voters should be allowed to rank the candidates in order of their preference. In this system, if no candidate received a majority of first-choice votes, the candidate with the lowest number of first-choice votes would be eliminated and the second-choice votes on those ballots would be added to the remaining candidates. This process would continue until a candidate received a majority of votes. This process would ensure that the person elected has substantial support from a majority of voters.

Otherwise, when multiple candidates seek election to the vacant seat, it would be necessary to conduct a primary as well as a general election or to settle for electing the person who receives the greatest number of votes -- which may be much less than a majority of voters. A candidate elected by that method may not reflect the views of the majority of voters and could, in fact, be a representative of a narrow interest group.

We note that MC 15-16 would authorize ranked choice voting in special elections for County Executive and County Council, and we believe it is equally appropriate for special elections for the Board of Education. We recommend that the delegation either amend MC 15-16 to include the Board of Education or that this bill be amended to include a parallel provision for ranked choice voting.

In sum, we support the provisions of this bill and believe that it could be further improved by an amendment authorizing instant runoff voting.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.