



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

December 4, 2017

To the Montgomery County Legislative Delegation:

Regarding bill MC-19-18 – Montgomery County – Ranked Choice Voting

The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County is pleased to testify in support of MC 19-18 – Montgomery County – Ranked Choice Voting, a bill to authorize Montgomery County to use Instant Runoff Voting to fill vacancies in county offices.

We thank Senator Kagan and Delegate Luedtke for their leadership in proposing this bill, and we urge the other members of the Montgomery County delegation to work for its adoption by the General Assembly.

Based on a study completed in 2009, LWVMC determined that Instant Runoff Voting would ensure that the candidates elected have at least some level of support from a majority of the voters.

We note the following issues regarding the current plurality voting system used in Maryland:

- Under the current plurality voting system used in Maryland, the candidate with the highest number (percentage) of votes wins. **In a crowded field, the winner may be a candidate who receives a very small number (percentage) of votes and was not the choice of a large number of voters.**
- The plurality system also allows a candidate with extreme views but supported by a united faction of voters to win the election. When a plurality of votes determines the winner, voters are often afraid to vote for the candidate they most favor because of their fear that a minority faction could win the election when the majority divides their votes among similar candidates. This undermines confidence in the electoral process.

A different issue can be the requirement for and cost of a runoff election if a majority vote is required. To ensure that candidates are supported by a majority (fifty percent plus one vote) of the voters, some states require the winner to receive a majority of the votes cast. Currently ten states [Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and Vermont] require at least some of their offices' winners to have a majority of the votes cast. When a majority is not achieved in a single election, there are usually primary run-offs a month or so later, between a predetermined number (but usually the top two) candidates.

Traditional runoff elections (1) are expensive, (2) delay the completion of the election process, and (3) often have reduced voter participation. In contrast, Instant Runoff Voting ensures election of a candidate with majority support in just one round of voting. Instant Runoff Voting asks voters to indicate their first, second, and third choices of candidate, and a



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

computer algorithm determines which candidate received the majority (50% plus one vote) of votes by totaling in order, the number of first place, second place and third place votes the candidate received. [One community that has used this system for many, many years is Cambridge Massachusetts.]

After considering the alternative methods of voting in 2009, the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County reached a consensus that Instant Runoff Voting should be used in any special election to fill a vacancy in a county office and to select members of the Board of Education. **Although our position specified only those particular elections, the rationale for supporting Instant Runoff Voting would be applicable to all offices listed in MC 19-18.**

We anticipate that the county would test the use of this voting method for a small number of elected offices before determining whether to implement it more widely. By allowing the county the flexibility to cover several offices, this bill would avoid the need for further legislation in the event that the county decides to make broader use of this voting method.

Using Instant Runoff Voting would strengthen voter confidence that the electoral process fairly reflects the views of the citizens. As the name implies, Instant Runoff Voting achieves that goal without the expense and delay of a separate run-off election. If this measure is implemented in Montgomery County, the League will work closely with the Board of Elections and other county offices to educate the public about Instant Runoff Voting.

The LWVMC study is posted on our website as **FS 2007-12 & 2008-05 Alternative Election Study Parts 1 & II** at http://www.lwvmocomd.org/fact_sheets .

Submitted by –

Nancy Bliss, president
League of Women Voters of Montgomery County