



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

Statement to the Montgomery County Delegation for the December 17, 2018, Local Bills Hearing on *MC-29-19 Montgomery County—Voting Methods*

To: Members of the Montgomery County State Legislative Delegation
From: Nancy Bliss, President, LWVMC

LWVMC supports ranked choice voting

This bill gives Montgomery County the ability to use ranked choice voting, an election method that ensures winning candidates have support from a majority of voters.

- Ranked choice voting empowers voters because it allows them to vote for several candidates, in rank order, whom they could support -- including their true first-choice candidate -- without feeling like they might be “wasting” their vote.
- It empowers elected officials because they will have a stronger mandate and more accountability when they know they are supported by a majority of voters.
- Everyone will benefit from more civilized, less negative campaigns as candidates will need to appeal to their opponents’ supporters for their second-choice votes.

Ranked choice voting is used only when there are three or more candidates for the same office. Consequently, it would most often be useful in a primary or in a general election with more than two candidates. Independent candidates often influence elections. Ranked voting creates a more efficient process in these situations, as explained below:

If no candidate receives more than 50% of first-choice votes, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated. The second-place votes of the voters whose first-choice candidate was eliminated are then counted, and the process is repeated until one candidate has more than 50% of the votes. This efficient process avoids time-consuming and costly run-off elections -- which are often less representative with declining voter turn-out.

We already have one municipality in Montgomery County – Takoma Park -- that is successfully using ranked choice voting. It’s time to expand to the rest of the county.

Here are some references to LWV relevant positions: Because ranked choice voting strengthens our democracy through better representation, we have adopted positions supporting ranked choice voting in the [LWVMC study on election processes](#) and the [LWVMD study on primary elections](#). Our testimony to the Montgomery County delegation is on record in support of this issue, including in [2015](#) and [2017](#).



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

Over the past 20 years the League of Women Voters has repeatedly studied ranked choice voting and supported it in various forms -- not just in Maryland but [nationwide](#). At least 14 state and local Leagues have examined ranked choice voting -- along with other voting methods -- and have adopted positions supportive of ranked choice voting. The LWV in Maine helped pass the legislation that authorized ranked choice voting, ensuring that the most recent election results in that State reflected the desires of a majority of voters.

In 2014 the Montgomery County Council established a Right to Vote Task Force, which was asked to review current election practices and recommend changes aimed at upholding voting rights and increasing voter participation. **In its [final report](#), the task force recommended the use of ranked choice voting for county elections.**

Ranked choice voting would certainly have been useful in the recent elections for the county executive and the county councilmember for district 1. The 2018 primary had a large number of candidates, many of whom won with a very small percentage of the overall vote. With ranked choice voting, nominees going forward to the general election would have been more representative of voters.

However, because we don't yet have ranked choice voting, some of the candidates won nomination with as low as 28% of the votes. This means that as many as 72% of the voters would have preferred someone else, and second choice desires weren't considered. It has never been clearer that Montgomery County is ready for ranked choice voting.

Specific provisions

Regarding the specific provisions in MC-29-19, we note that it would also allow for Montgomery County to adopt "approval voting" as an alternative to ranked choice voting. The League has no position on approval voting (which allows voting for multiple candidates without ranking them).

Further, the local bill lists several offices that could be subject to the voting methods authorized by the bill, and not all of them are explicitly covered by our formally-adopted LWVMC positions. For example, the LWVMC has no position on whether multiple-winner elections such as at-large county council seats should be covered by ranked choice voting. However, we do not oppose these offices being included in the list of offices potentially subject to ranked choice voting. We note also that Judge of the Orphans Court is a position that does not exist in Montgomery County, and the mention of this position in the bill is a drafting error should be corrected.

Conclusion

The LWVMC strongly supports ranked choice voting. The League was founded on the belief that voters should play a critical role in democracy and ranked choice voting maximizes that ability.



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

We urge the introduction and passage of legislation that would allow Montgomery County to use ranked choice voting.

Finally, I want to remind the delegation that another of our top legislative priorities is redistricting reform. We will be submitting a separate written statement on that topic, detailing how gerrymandering in Maryland violates democratic principles and why it needs to end.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this statement with you. Please note the references below.

References:

1. LWVMC positions on election process, including ranked choice voting:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/lwvmc/pages/27/attachments/original/1431899942/Position_ELECTION_ROCESS.pdf?1431899942
2. LWVMD study fact sheet on issues relating to primaries in Maryland, including ranked choice voting:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/lwvmaryland/pages/127/attachments/original/1505415787/Primary_Election_Fact_Sheet.pdf?1505415787
3. LWVMC 2015 testimony to Montgomery County delegation in favor of ranked choice voting:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/lwvmc/pages/82/attachments/original/1451685678/2015-11-30_Testimony_to_MC_Delegation_re_Local_Bill_15-16_Ranked_Voting.pdf?1451685678
4. LWVMC 2017 testimony to Montgomery County delegation in favor of ranked choice voting:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/lwvmc/pages/82/attachments/original/1520184752/2017-12-04_Testimony_to_MC_Delegation_re_Bill_MC19-18_Ranked_Choice_VotingRev.pdf?1520184752
5. Oregon LWV report on positions from other Leagues nationwide supporting ranked choice voting:
<http://lwv.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/POSITIONS-FROM-OTHER-LEAGUES-Election-Methods.pdf>
6. Final report of the 2014 Right to Vote Task Force, including recommendations for ranked choice voting:
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/REPORTS/RightToVoteTaskForce/RightToVoteTaskForceReport.pdf>
7. LWVMC 2014 testimony on recommendations made by the Right to Vote Task Force, including ranked choice voting:
https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/lwvmc/pages/82/attachments/original/1441036036/2014-09-23_Testimony_to_Council_re_Report_of_Right_to_Vote_Task_Force.pdf?1441036036