20250317 Comments to Montgomery County BOE

by Michael Fletcher, Derwood, MD:

<u>Ranked Choice Voting</u>

Before I provide comments on RCV, I have to ask, "What is the problem with our current system?" The recent bills promoting RCV in the MD legislature provide no compelling reasons for expending the time and treasure to change the current voting system. The Fiscal and Policy Notes for HB0423/MC 1-24 addressing implementing RCV (and another method called Approval Voting) in Montgomery County estimated a cost to the state of $240,000 for RCV in fiscal 2026. The estimated cost to Montgomery County in fiscal 2026 would be $1,100,000 for RCV and $601,000 for AV. Additional costs are projected in later years. These expenditures are not justified. (But I am sure the current political leadership in Montgomery County would have no problem bumping up the property tax a few cents to pay for them. Maybe we should change the voting process so only property owners can vote.)

RCV forces voters to rank all candidates, even candidates they never heard of or candidates that are anathema to them. Then the results of these selections are determined by a computer algorithm that generates a winner. Current state law requires a voting system to be capable of creating a paper record of all votes cast in order that an audit trail is available in the event of a recount, including a manual recount. The counting methods used in RCV would prevent the SBE from certifying it under state law. Instead of ballots being counted once, RCV ballots are counted repeatedly making it impossible to conduct a post-election audit. And an accurate manual recount audit of ballots would be impossible.

RCV is confusing and leads to voter disenfranchisement. During each round of ballot counting, some voters' choices will fall by the wayside, discarded, and those political voices, silenced. Despite spending millions to educate voters on RCV, New York City in its 2021 mayoral race, experienced massive chaos and confusion. So many minority voters' ballots were discarded that the head of the New York State NAACP said, "Ranked choice voting is not beneficial to minorities. It's voter suppression."

The RVC process would allow candidates to win without securing a majority of the votes. The election winner would govern without a mandate from the voters.

RCV divorces candidates from the issues. When multiple names on a ballot must be ranked it, is virtually impossible for a voter to know the platform of each candidate. RCV thus becomes a pick-a-name process. This allows marginal policies to creep into the body politic.

Although Montgomery County voters are accustomed to waiting for election results, using RCV to eliminate runoffs does not guarantee faster results because the multiple

rounds of vote tabulation can substantially delay the determination of a winner and increase the cost of the election.

The MIT Election Lab studied the impact of RCV in Maine. https://electionlab.mit.edu/articles/effect-ranked-choice-voting-maine The study found that "RCV produced significantly lower levels of voter confidence, voter satisfaction, and ease of use. It also increased the perception that the voting process was slanted against the respondent's party. Similarly, the researcher found that it increased the amount of time it took to vote by nearly 12 seconds per candidate than voting using a plurality ballot. Although Montgomery County voters are accustomed to waiting for election results, using RCV to eliminate runoffs does not guarantee faster results in the polling place or in determining the winner. RCV requires multiple rounds of vote tabulation that can substantially delay the determination of a winner and increase the cost of the election.

The MIT study also determined that RCV did not improve the civility of campaigns.

Follow-Up on Previous Comments to the Board

Finally, has the Board heard back from the SBE regarding what constitutes a reliable source of information to begin the process to confirm the death of a registrant?