

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 20-0196R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Henry, President Scott, Councilmembers Dorsey, Burnett,
Bullock, Cohen, Sneed, Reisinger, Schleifer, Pinkett
Introduced and adopted: February 10, 2020

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONCERNING

Request for State Action – Ranked Choice Voting or Open Primaries

FOR the purpose of calling on the state to pass enabling legislation that authorizes Baltimore City to adopt either a ranked choice or open primary election voting system, to ensure inclusive and democratic elections for City officials.

Recitals

Baltimore, unlike most major cities, selects party candidates for the general election through partisan primaries. Since Baltimore voters are overwhelmingly registered Democrats and non-Democrat has been elected to a major City office for decades, this effectively means that the preferences of Baltimore's thousands of non-Democratic voters have no impact on the selection of our elected officials.

Equally troubling is the fact that a primary candidate can secure the nomination and the party's sole spot on the general election ballot, with a plurality of votes rather than an outright majority, which means that in a crowded field of candidates the party nomination can easily go to someone who a majority of primary voters actually voted against. Under these circumstances, we could find ourselves in a city of well over half a million being governed by people who were the first choice of only a few thousand residents – a profoundly anti-democratic result.

Ranked choice voting and open primaries encourage candidates to make more voter contact than the traditional style of voting. Aiming to reach as many voters as possible, instead of catering towards a certain demographic, elects more diverse representation. Furthermore, candidates are less likely to negatively campaign because they are still working to rank somewhere on the voters' ballots. Creating a system that incentivizes civility over cynicism is an essential to move democracy forward.

Many other communities – including more than 80% of the United States' 50 largest cities with elected mayors – avoid these issues by either having ranked choice voting or an open primary system. Under these systems, all qualified candidates for office, regardless of party affiliation, run in one primary election open to all voters. To be elected, a candidate must then secure a majority of votes in either the primary or a subsequent general election between the top 2 vote getters. Adopting either of these approaches ensures that all voters have a say in who will govern them and prevents a candidate from being elected without genuine support from a majority of voters.

Baltimore would be well served to adopt a more democratic and inclusive approach, particularly at a time when so many Baltimoreans are questioning whether or not our government

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 truly represents them and can be responsive to their needs. However, much like the effort to
2 align our municipal and national election cycles, this is a change that would need alterations to
3 State law to enact.

4 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the City
5 Council calls on the state to pass enabling legislation that authorizes Baltimore City to adopt
6 either a ranked choice or open primary election voting system, to ensure inclusive and democratic
7 elections for City officials.

8 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor, the
9 Mayor, the Honorable Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City House and Senate Delegations
10 to the Maryland General Assembly, the President of the Maryland Senate, the Maryland House
11 Speaker, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.