



**SUPPORT for House Bill 997 - Blue Ribbon Commission on Voting, Openness, Transparency, and
Equality (VOTE) in Elections
Rebecca Strandberg, Former Chair and Board Member
March 11, 2015**

Madam Chair, Mr. Vice-Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rebecca Strandberg and I represent the Committee for Montgomery. The Committee for Montgomery (CFM) is a coalition of leaders representing a broad cross-section of Montgomery County business, labor, education, civic, arts and humanities, and community-based organizations. Through its membership, CFM represents more than 350,000 Montgomery County residents. CFM supports policies, programs and laws that promote development of our economy and infrastructure, the education and health of our citizens, and increased opportunities for Montgomery County's 1,000,000 diverse residents.

Committee for Montgomery rules require that 85% of the membership must agree to take a particular stance on a piece of legislation. **CFM unanimously agreed to advocate for House Bill 997.**

In both the most recent primary and general elections, voter turnout had dropped from previous elections. Despite the increase in population and voter registration, voter turnout has decreased. Many elected officials, political scientists and pundits have opined about ways to better engage voters including changes in primary voting, redistricting reform and campaign finance reform. To find the best fit for Maryland voters, the Committee for Montgomery is supporting legislation to create a Blue Ribbon Commission to review all the options and report back with recommendations to the General Assembly.

The legislation would only create a group to study ways to enhance voter participation. It will not implement ideas such as open primaries and the top-two approach. Ideas used by other states to drive additional turnout should be studied and evaluated to see if they are appropriate or inappropriate for Maryland to adopt.

Thank you to Delegate Hixson for her leadership on this issue and we ask for a favorable report.