



TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

SB 298 Election Law - Local Public Campaign Financing - Boards of Education

POSITION: Support

BY: Lois Hybl and Richard Willson, Co-Presidents

DATE: February 6, 2020

The League of Women Voters supports methods of financing political campaigns that

- Enhance political equality for all citizens;
- Ensure maximum participation by citizens in the political process and protect representative democracy from being distorted by big spending in election campaigns;
- Enable candidates to compete equitably for public office;
- Ensure that candidates have sufficient funds to communicate their messages to the public; and,
- Combat corruption and undue influence in government.

Allowing local governments to voluntarily implement public campaign finance programs for local elected offices is one way to achieve these goals. Thanks to legislation previously passed by the Maryland General Assembly, counties may establish their own system of public campaign financing for County Executive and County Council candidates. This bill would expand that opportunity by allowing local governments to set up public campaign finance programs for candidates for the Board of Education.

In September 2014 the Montgomery County Council unanimously enacted Bill 16-14, which established a Public Election Fund to provide public campaign financing for County Executive and County Council candidates. Subsequently, Howard and Prince George's Counties as well as Baltimore City enacted Public Campaign Finance programs. The structure of these programs ensures that none of these candidates will be beholden to large donors and all of them must demonstrate broad support for their candidacy by raising a large amount of money in small donations.

SB 298 requires the counties to establish criteria for participating in the program and to provide the funds and staffing necessary to administer and audit the public campaign finance program. It excludes student members who are elected to a Board of Education from participating in public campaign financing.

We urge a favorable report on SB 298.