



SB613: Public Financing Act – Candidate and Matching Fund Revisions (Maryland Fair Elections Act)

Thursday, February 20th, 2020

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

FAVORABLE

Governor Hogan and the Maryland General Assembly,

We are a diverse group of local elected officials, good government, faith, environmental, and community organizations who have united together to support a new way to fund Maryland elections.

We hope you will support efforts to modernize Maryland’s Gubernatorial public financing system and expand the program to include Comptroller and Attorney General (SB613/HB1125).

We are thrilled that the Maryland General Assembly passed the Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013 which made it possible for Maryland counties to build small donor campaign finance programs locally. Since, Montgomery County, Howard County, Prince George's County, and Baltimore City have all established these new campaign finance systems, and Montgomery County has successfully run their first election using the new system. And, Baltimore County and Anne Arundel County have also begun the process of establishing local programs.

As you are aware, Maryland Gubernatorial elections are fueled primarily by large donations and donations from non-residents, be they out-of-state donors, corporations, or PACs. As these large donations drive election spending, it's easy for Marylanders across the state: from the shore, to our cities, to western Maryland to feel like their voices don't matter.

The role of large donors also contributes to an already shrinking faith in government. A University of Maryland and Washington Post poll from 2017 found that amongst Democrats, Republicans, and Independent voters:

- 96% of participants blame money in politics for causing dysfunction in the U.S. political system.
- 94% of participants blame wealthy political donors for causing dysfunction in the U.S. political system.

We have worked with Senator Pinsky and Delegate Feldmark to ensure the 2020 bill meets the needs of Marylanders, expanding on the best practices from the local programs.

The Maryland Fair Elections Act creates a voluntary program that provides limited public matching funds to help finance the campaigns of candidates who demonstrate popular support and reject large contributions and all contributions from corporations and other non-individuals. This amplifies the voices of constituents while curbing the power of big money in elections. The program accomplishes this by eliminating participating candidates' reliance on large individual, corporate, and out-of-jurisdiction donors, while providing incentives to reach out to Marylanders for small contributions. In so doing, it encourages more electoral participation from residents. We hope increasing engagement will strengthen civic life and faith in our state government.

So, please fix and fund Maryland's Gubernatorial public financing system and expand the program to include Comptroller and Attorney General.

We look forward to working with you to build a stronger democracy by bringing the Fair Elections Fund program home to Maryland.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Forte
Activist
Anne Arundel County Indivisible

Emily Ranson
Maryland Program Coordinator
Clean Water Action

Joanne Antoine
Director
Common Cause Maryland

Wendy Fields
Executive Director
Democracy Initiative

Rianna Eckel
Senior Maryland Organizer
Food & Water Action

Charlie Cooper
President
Get Money Out Maryland

Christine Lemyze
Defend Democracy Team Lead
Indivisible Howard County

Lois Hybl and Richard Willson
Co-Presidents
League of Women Voters of Maryland

Paulette Hammond
President
Maryland Conservation Council

Marceline White
Executive Director
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition

Kim Coble
Executive Director
Maryland League of Conservation Voters

Cecilia Plante
Co-Chair
Maryland Legislative Coalition

Emily Scarr
Director
Maryland PIRG

Josh Tulkin
Chapter Director
Maryland Sierra Club

Rev. Kobi Little
Political Action Chair
Maryland State Conference NAACP

Bob Muehlenkamp
Chair
Our Revolution Maryland

Stefani Olsen
Co-Chair
Our Revolution in Montgomery County

Larry Stafford
Executive Director
Progressive Maryland

Cristi Demnowicz
Chair
Represent Maryland

Audra Peddicord
Group Leader
Represent US - Maryland Chapter

Michelle G. Koul
Activist
WISE
(Women Indivisible Strong Effective, AACo)