

SB613: Public Financing Act – Candidate and Matching Fund Revisions (Maryland Fair Elections Act)
Thursday, February 20th, 2020
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
FAVORABLE

WISE (Women Indivisible Strong Effective) is a group of over 700 women from AACo (primarily D33) who work to promote inclusivity, fairness, and safety in our communities and keep our local leaders accountable. WISE is in favor of public campaign financing programs at every level of government. Studies have shown that not only does it reduce the influence of big business and PACs on our candidates' decisions, but it increases voter involvement and turnout, encourages candidates to run voter-centered campaigns and increases the number and the diversity of candidates who run. In this testimony I would like to illustrate the need for this type of election fund by discussing some of the spending that took place in the last election cycle. The data described herein was obtained from <https://campaignfinance.maryland.gov/>.

In 2018 WISE monitored campaign donations and spending and tried to expand disclosure about the type and amounts of funding that our local D33 candidates were accepting. The incumbent senator ran unopposed in both 2014 and 2010, and he and other incumbents had funds rolled over from past election cycles that were available for immediate expenditure. For example, Jerry Walker, a sitting Anne Arundel county council member at the time, was able to accumulate almost \$200,000 to enter the D33 delegate race, with another incumbent delegate in second place with almost \$70,000. Four D33 challengers (all women that did not hold any kind of public office at the time), were barely breaking \$5,000 at that same point.

Jerry Walker obtained more than two thirds of his donations from businesses, while incumbent delegates drew between a fifth and a quarter of their donations from businesses. The incumbent senator accepted nearly a third his donations from businesses. In comparison, business contributions were 0% to 2% of the challengers' donations. It is clear that incumbents have a major advantage due to their business contacts. The fact that sitting county and state officials are magnets for business donations is no surprise, as they are often making decisions that affect those businesses.

In the 2018 D33 delegate race where seven candidates were running for three seats, it turned out that the losing challengers were only 0.6 and 1.2% of the total votes behind the least favored successful incumbent. If those challengers were not ultimately outspent by this delegate by *five to one*, one of them could have easily won his seat. (The incumbent senator outspent his challenger seven to one!)

We support SB613 as a way to lessen the influence of corporate money on election outcomes. As the public becomes more educated about what it means to be a small donor candidate, it is our belief that candidates will take part in this program not because it will provide financing levels that will compete with corporate donations, but because voters will be using the small donor nature of the candidate's financials as a litmus test for who they are willing to support. A public donor fund will ultimately create a more diverse field of candidates who are accountable to the individual voter.

Thank you for all you do for Maryland,
Dr. Michelle Koul
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