



Testimony on HB 337
Election Law - Local Public Campaign Financing - Boards of Education
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland and Maryland Sierra Club support HB 337, which would allow for public campaign finance systems in the counties to also cover the board of education, expanding on the Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013 (CFRA).

The Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013 included language that provided counties the authority to create public campaign funding programs that would allow candidates for county council and county executive to run for office with the support of their communities. In 2014, Montgomery County became the first to establish a program with unanimous support by the County Council. In 2016, a majority of Howard County voters approved a charter amendment which, after being implemented by the Council, is now in the process of being funded for use in 2022. In 2018, the Prince George's County Council established their own program and Baltimore City voters approved a charter amendment which is now in the final phase of being implemented by the City Council. In 2020, Baltimore County voters will have the opportunity to approve a charter amendment giving their Council authority to establish a program as well. The demand for these programs continue to grow throughout the state and this is largely due to the success of Montgomery County's Public Election Fund (PEF).

Montgomery County's first use of the PEF during the 2018 election cycle was a success. A report released by Maryland PIRG found that the program worked as intended. Candidates who opted into the program raised 98% more of their money from small contributions compared to the 3% from nonparticipating candidates. They also received an average contribution of \$86 compared to \$1,145 from nonparticipating candidates and with matching funds, their average contribution amount was similar which made them competitive. We also saw changes in the strategies being used by candidates to reach voters. Many of our members who live in the County highlighted participating candidates hosting free or more affordable events, candidates taking more time to learn about the issues that matter to them, and outreach activities in communities that were typically ignored until late in the elections. We also saw more diverse communities being engaged in the election, many volunteering and contributing to local candidates for the first time and being confident in the fact that their voices were being heard.

These programs have been gaining popularity in Maryland for a simple reason: particularly since the *Citizens United* decision, Americans across the political spectrum feel that our campaign system is disconnected from the populace, and that LLCs and wealthy individuals render regular Marylanders' voices meaningless in the current campaign finance environment. Small dollar public funding programs, on the other hand, lift up regular Marylanders' voices, and empower those with community-supported ideas who may not have connections to deep-pocketed interests.

While CFRA allows counties to address this problem for county council candidates, the problem exists at every level from Governor on down. Common Cause Maryland and Maryland Sierra Club support lifting up the voices of regular Americans in every election for every office, and so we request a favorable report on HB 337 to allow counties to continue to expand public funding programs to Boards of Education at their discretion.

