

Feb 18, 2020

Testimony on HB 951
Election Law - Disclosure of Contributions by Persons Doing Public Business – Enforcement
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 951 which will expand SBE's authority to enforce filing requirements and fees for late filing of statements under Title 14. The bill will allow SBE to refer entities doing public business for prosecution after giving entities notice that they are in violation of campaign finance laws.

There is growing frustration by citizens over the role that special interests are playing in our campaigns. Particularly in situations where it can appear that there is a conflict of interest, Maryland does not have unlimited ability to fight back against the surging tide of special interest donations. Public Businesses are businesses that make or have a single contract with a State or local governmental entity involving cumulative consideration of at least \$200,000. They are required to submit statements to SBE regarding any applicable contributions. The issue is whether they are disclosing and disclosing on time.

HB 951 addresses the lack of adherence to campaign finance laws. Entities are abusing the system by filing late or not filing at all. Currently, there is not much incentive to follow the rules because the highest amount an entity would have to pay in fees is \$1,000. This is not having much of a deterrent effect. Increasing SBE's authority, as well as, the actual punishment will hopefully be an effective solution that will help deter bad behavior by public businesses.

HB 951 is a step in the direction of Maryland that clarifies enforcement of campaign finance laws. It is always good to protect against any potential further abuse campaign limits and we recommend a favorable report.