

February 21, 2022

Testimony on SB 358
Public Financing Act – State Senate and House of Delegates
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 358, which would create a small donor matching system for General Assembly candidates so that they can run free from the influence of wealthy donors.

Since the disastrous *Citizens United* decision and its progeny, America's elections have become deluged with outside spending. Wealthy interests have driven up the cost to compete in elections at every level, effectively boxing out candidates who might not have access to wealthy benefactors but do have broad support within their own communities.

Maryland is no exception. In our [2019 study](#)¹, we analyzed the winning candidates' fundraising totals and found that monetary expectations for candidates continue to rise. From the years 2015-2018, winning senatorial candidates received a contribution total of \$266,000.00 on average. This was a slight decrease from the 2014 election cycle, but it is still a significant amount of money for the everyday citizen aspiring to run. Delegates received an average contribution total of \$125,499.00, which is a 64% increase from the 2014 election (where the average amount fundraised was \$79,878.00).

Marylanders should be concerned about the rise in candidate fundraising totals. When the cost to run for office is high, candidates often need to rely on mega donors or corporate interests to be competitive. SB 358 would help amplify the voices of regular Marylanders, giving the candidates they support the ability to compete with the candidates backed by big-money interests.

Candidates opting into the public financing program would first have to show sufficient community interest by raising small donations from Maryland voters, refraining from taking donations from non-individuals and donations of \$250 or below. Once the State Board of Elections verifies a candidate has met the qualifying thresholds - **at least 250 eligible contributions totaling at \$15,000 for State Senators and at least 150 eligible donations totaling \$15,000 for State Delegates** – that candidate's donations would then be matched by funds from the Fair Campaign Financing Fund, **at a rate of 6-to-1 or 2-to-1**, depending on the size of the contribution, with no match provided for the last \$100. Candidates for State Senator would be eligible to receive \$150,000 per election and candidates for State Delegate eligible for \$90,000 per elections, amounts that we believe would ensure candidates are able to run competitive campaigns in any part of the state.

Because SB 358 will significantly amplify the voices of regular Marylanders to compete with the big-money spending unleashed by *Citizens United*, we ask the committee for a favorable report.

¹ <https://www.commoncause.org/maryland/resource/campaigns-in-maryland-does-it-still-cost-a-lot-to-win/>