

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 271 (Senator Kelley, *et al.*)  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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Election Law - Use of Campaign Funds for Meeting and Conference Expenses

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This bill expands the statutory definition of “expenditure” under the Election Law Article to include a gift, transfer, disbursement, or promise of money or thing of value by or on behalf of a campaign finance entity to pay for travel, lodging, meals, and registration expenses of an elected official or a candidate that are associated with attendance at meetings or conferences focused on legislative issues, process, or public policy analysis pertinent to the office that the elected official holds or that the candidate seeks.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill is not expected to materially affect State finances.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Current Law:** Unless otherwise expressly authorized by law, all campaign finance activity for an election governed by State law must be conducted through a campaign finance entity. All assets received by or on behalf of a campaign finance entity must be delivered to and maintained by the treasurer for the purposes of the campaign finance entity. Assets may be disbursed only if they have passed through the hands of the treasurer and only in accordance with the purposes of the entity.

The term “expenditure” is used in a number of contexts under State campaign finance laws, including recordkeeping requirements of campaign finance entities, which specify, among other things, that the treasurer of a campaign finance entity must keep a detailed and

accurate account book of all assets received, expenditures made, and obligations incurred by or on behalf of the entity. Campaign finance reports filed by campaign finance entities also must include information with respect to all contributions received and all expenditures made by or on behalf of the campaign finance entity during the designated reporting period.

“Expenditure” is defined as a gift, transfer, disbursement, or promise of money or a thing of value by or on behalf of a campaign finance entity to promote or assist in the promotion of the success or defeat of a candidate, political party, or question at an election, or to pay for the publication expense of a legislative newsletter.

**Background:** The issue of permitted and prohibited uses of campaign funds was addressed by the Maryland Attorney General’s Advisory Committee on Campaign Finance, which was formed in the fall of 2010 to examine and develop recommendations regarding the State’s campaign finance laws. In its January 4, 2011 report, the committee reviewed past applications of the governing “electoral purpose” test (that campaign expenditures by a campaign finance entity must serve an “electoral purpose”) to different types of expenditures and noted that a more relaxed standard may be warranted for areas that serve both official and political purposes. Authorized use of campaign funds to pay for conference attendance has depended on whether the event is considered a political “networking” opportunity, or whether outside political events held during nonconference time could justify use of campaign funds to cover most of the expense. The committee concluded that sometimes the distinction between events that enhance one’s candidacy and those that improve one’s knowledge of a key issue or one’s effectiveness as a lawmaker appears artificial or it may be difficult to predict whether a particular expense will be allowed.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** HB 562 of 2014 and HB 447 of 2013 each passed the House and received a hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, but no further action was taken on either bill. In addition, similar bills were introduced in the 2010 through 2012 sessions.

**Cross File:** HB 239 (Delegate C. Howard, *et al.*) - Ways and Means.

**Information Source(s):** State Board of Elections, Office of the Attorney General, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 16, 2015  
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