

SB 374 - Campaign Finance - Special Session of the

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Position: FAV

February 4, 2021

Testimony on SB 374**Campaign Finance - Special Session of the General Assembly - Contributions Prohibited Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs****Position: Favorable**

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 374, which would extend the current campaign finance prohibition on the Governor, Lt. Governor, Comptroller, and legislators during a regular session to also apply during a special session.

Maryland's prohibition on fundraising during the legislative session is a critical one. This provision creates a strong bright-line between someone's role as a state elected official and their role as a candidate. It also provides reassurance to the public that when an elected official is deciding on policy in Annapolis, it is their constituents – not their donors – that are influencing those decisions.

The current prohibition on elected officials accepting donations during the legislative session is designed to help build a firewall between influence-seeking donors and state elected officials' priorities. This prohibition should also apply during a special session.

While imperfect at combatting that influence, the prohibition does help to alleviate concerns that state elected officials actions during the General Assembly session, including during a special session, are shaped by donor priorities by ensuring that those donors' most powerful means of influence – campaign donations – are disallowed until after the years' decisions are made.

Because SB 374 will strengthen the current prohibition, we urge a favorable report.

SB374 Special Session Fundraising Testimony (2021)

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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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**SB374: Campaign Finance - Special Session of the General Assembly - Contributions
Prohibited**
Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
February 4, 2021 | 11:00am

Last March, the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) adjourned early for fear of an outbreak of COVID-19 among legislators and their staff. During the interim, a handful of legislators [called for a Special Session](#) to address issues related to racial injustice and the economic effects of the pandemic. While we did not meet again in 2020, it is important that we plan for the future.

Sixty-one times, the General Assembly has convened in Special Session. Current law prohibits legislators from accepting donations during the Legislative Session. [SB374](#) simply seeks to extend the current prohibition to include special sessions.

This new restriction would ensure that our government is functioning transparently and without influence from special interests. Even if legislators are not persuaded by contributions, it removes even the *appearance* of corruption. Alaska, Connecticut, New Mexico, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington already have similar laws. Maryland should take this simple but important step to support government accountability and transparency.

I urge a favorable report of SB374.