February 1, 2022

Testimony on HB 291
Election Law – Contested Elections
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 291 which would increase transparency in campaign finance reporting around the recount process.

The recount process is a critical part of Maryland's democratic government; it gives candidates the opportunity to petition for a recount after an election where the margin of victory for a race is narrow. This process provides reassurance in the result but is - given the amount of money spent in instances where recounts are needed, it is critical that citizens be able to see who is funding these efforts. It is also critically important that we ensure that candidates who choose to opt in to public financing programs are able to adhere to the confinements provided by these programs.

HB 291 aims to establish disclosure requirements through the creation of contested elections committees that are on par with those in place for candidate and other similar entities - increasing reporting and transparency in Maryland's campaign finance law. The bill also provides enabling authority, allowing county governments to establish rules governing the use of public funds in instances where a recount is needed for candidates participating in a local public financing program. Candidates who opt to use a public financing program would be required to establish contested election committees, likely with more regulations than candidates that have not in order to adhere to the overall goals of these programs.

Maryland has a well-developed system of campaign finance law, a system that ensures everyday citizens can trace who is making donations and what special interest voices are being heard in that process. Common Cause Maryland believes that the recount process should adhere to that same level of scrutiny. HB 291 would implement critical reporting requirements in furtherance of that goal, we for that reason we urge a favorable report.