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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 257 - ELECTION LAW -
AFFILIATING WITH A PARTY AND VOTING - UNAFFILIATED VOTERS**

February 6, 2024

By Charlie Cooper, President

Get Money Out–Maryland is an all-volunteer force seeking to get big money out of our political system and make elections fairer. We believe that every citizen should have equal access to the ballot as a voter or as a candidate. District lines should be fair to every voter, regardless of race, ethnicity, or party affiliation. The corruption of big money in politics must be eliminated, and the disproportionate influence of concentrated wealth reduced.

We support House Bill 257 because it improves access to the ballot for unaffiliated voters and because it could play a role in moderating the hyper-partisanship that has afflicted the U.S. electoral system in recent decades.

In many elections for local offices and for seats in the General Assembly, the low-turnout primary counts more than the general election in determining who actually wins local and district offices and congressional seats. Many new voters or voters who are new to Maryland may not be aware that registering unaffiliated means they cannot participate in primary elections that are so critical.

This bill gives those voters more than a week of extra time to learn about the importance of an upcoming primary election and register with a party so that they can vote. The bill would not allow voters already registered with a party extra time to switch and “cherry-pick” which party’s primary election they want to vote in. Allowing unaffiliated voters a chance to participate in a primary election of their choice could bring in more voters who are not rigidly aligned with the latest party litmus tests, thus incentivizing candidates to take positions with broader appeal.

The bill also mitigates an unfair situation whereby those who have not registered can declare a party affiliation all the way up to election day, but those who have registered unaffiliated are barred from primary participation before they may even be aware that the primary is occurring. The bill will also give more voters a sense of agency by participating in a truly contested primary election rather than simply in a general election where the outcome is not really in doubt.

Please promote voter participation by giving your favorable report to House Bill 257.