

02/18/2025

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TESTIMONY ON HB#/0906- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Campaign Finance - Political Organizations - Disclosures on Solicitations (Stop Scam PACs Act)

TO: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee
FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0906, **Campaign Finance - Political Organizations - Disclosures on Solicitations (Stop Scam PACs Act)**

The misuse of technology has now made possible new techniques for influencing a voter's voting decision by spreading false misinformation for that purpose. And who is responsible for that fraud is hidden from the voters.

Maryland has confronted this problem. In 2023 the largest authority line fine in state history was levied against 1776 PAC for texts in 2022 school board race in Carroll County. ¹

"The State Board of Elections is committed to continuing to ensure that there is no mystery about who is communicating with voters in Maryland Elections," [State Elections Administrator Jared DeMarinis] said in a written statement. "We will be working hard with the State Prosecutor and other enforcement partners to keep Maryland elections honest and fair."

In the November 2024 election for U.S. Senator shown that this is not just one political party or candidate skirting the law and using these tactics: ²

A controversial out-of-state Super PAC is facing criticism for what some are labeling a disinformation campaign aimed at swaying Maryland's competitive U.S. Senate race.

Thousands of registered voters in Maryland, along with hundreds of thousands nationally, are receiving automated calls and digital ads from a mysterious group called "Save Western Culture."

¹ <https://marylandmatters.org/2023/10/13/largest-authority-line-fine-in-state-history-levied-against-1776-pac-for-texts-in-2022-school-board-race/>

² <https://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/shadowy-super-pac-accused-of-deceptive-election-tactics-in-maryland-senate-race-larry-hogan-angela-alsobrooks-us-election-save-western-culture-libertarian-mike-scott>

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“Every election cycle, national Democrats set up dark-money groups designed to confuse voters and prop up third-party candidates who have no chance at winning,” Berg said. “This seems to be more of the same, and voters should reject this disingenuous tactic.”

This bill will give the authorities new powers in combatting this scourge on our elections. This will occur by requiring certain political organizations to include certain disclaimers and statements on certain solicitations. It will provide the authority to the State Administrator of Elections to investigate a potential violation of the Act and authorize the State Board after the issuance of a public report of its findings to prohibit a person who violated the Act from making further solicitations for a certain period or imposing a civil penalty not to exceed \$10,000.

Voters deserve to know fully who is behind these advertisements for any candidate or party to allow them to evaluate the truth behind them and the motives of the identified sender.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0906.