

Department of Legislative Services  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
 First Reader

House Bill 1363  
 Ways and Means

(Delegate Mosby, *et al.*)

Maryland Small Donor Incentive Act

This bill establishes the Maryland Small Donor Incentive Act, to provide public campaign financing for General Assembly candidates. The bill requires that the Governor include an appropriation of \$1 million in the State budget for fiscal 2019 and each fiscal year thereafter to provide public campaign financing to candidates under the Act.

Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures increase by at least \$340,900 in FY 2018 due to personnel and software programming costs. Future year general fund expenditures reflect an annual \$1 million appropriation to the Fair Campaign Financing Fund (FCFF), beginning in FY 2019, and ongoing personnel costs. Special fund revenues increase by \$1 million annually beginning in FY 2019, reflecting the receipt of the mandated appropriations by FCFF. Special fund expenditures increase by indeterminate amounts in FY 2018 and 2019, and future fiscal years in which gubernatorial elections occur, to provide public financing to candidates. **This bill establishes a mandated appropriation beginning in FY 2019.**

(in dollars)	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
SF Revenue	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
GF Expenditure	\$340,900	\$1,317,300	\$1,331,700	\$1,346,800	\$1,362,800
SF Expenditure	-	-	\$0	\$0	-
Net Effect	(\$340,900)	(\$317,300)	(\$331,700)	(\$346,800)	(\$362,800)

*Note: ( ) = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease*

**Local Effect:** It is assumed the bill's penalty provisions and other provisions authorizing court action will not materially affect local government finances.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## **Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** The Campaign Finance Division (CFD) in the State Board of Elections (SBE) is responsible for managing and supervising the system of public financing of elections established under the Act and adopting regulations as necessary. CFD must ensure that the system of public financing of elections (1) accommodates qualifying candidates on a first-come, first-served basis; (2) establishes an initial limit on the number of participating candidates during an election cycle; and (3) allows for an increase or decrease in the number of participating candidates during the election cycle in correlation to the amount of available funding.

CFD is given specified authority with regard to its management and supervision of the public financing system and is required to, among other things:

- develop, as part of the Campaign Finance Database, an electronic database accessible to the public on the Internet that includes specified information, including contributions to and expenditures by participating candidates and matching funds that are disbursed to participating candidates;
- develop an education program that includes informational materials and compliance manuals to inform candidates and the public about the purpose and effect of the Act; and
- report to the General Assembly after each election cycle regarding the Act and contributions and expenditures under it.

The bill establishes a process for candidates to qualify for public financing under the Act that generally consists of:

- a requirement that a candidate seeking to qualify file notice of the candidate's intent with CFD by February 15 of the year of the election and, before raising any contributions, establish a publicly funded campaign account for the purpose of receiving contributions and making expenditures in accordance with the requirements of State election law;
- a requirement that a candidate collect qualifying contributions, during a period beginning September 1 of the year preceding the primary election and ending 45 days before the date of the primary election, of (1) for a Senate candidate, at least \$15,000 from at least 200 individuals and (2) for a House of Delegates candidate, at least \$5,000 from at least 100 individuals; and

- a determination by CFD (which is final and not subject to judicial review) whether to certify a candidate as a participating candidate no later than 15 days after receipt of (1) a declaration that the candidate will abide by the regulations and policies of CFD and (2) a campaign finance report containing all qualifying contributions and other contributions received, and all expenditures made, by the candidate.

CFD must alter, by regulation, the amount of qualifying contributions required, for the election cycle beginning January 1, 2023, and for each subsequent election cycle, based on the rate of inflation in the just-concluded election cycle.

A participating candidate, or a person acting on behalf of the candidate, is prohibited from making a campaign expenditure for the candidate other than from the candidate's publicly funded campaign account, with the exception of maintaining a petty cash fund. CFD may have access at any time to the records and transactions of an account and may terminate an account in accordance with regulations adopted by CFD. A participating candidate is prohibited from being a member of a slate unless all members of the slate are participating candidates.

The public financing system is funded through FCFF, which holds funds for the existing public financing system for gubernatorial tickets under the Public Financing Act (PFA). Funds collected under the new public financing system for General Assembly candidates established by the bill are deposited in the fund and distributions of public financing to participating candidates are made from the fund. The bill repeals specified provisions of PFA regarding distributions of public contributions under the Act and requires SBE to adopt regulations regarding the distribution of funds to eligible gubernatorial tickets under PFA and General Assembly candidates participating under the Maryland Small Donor Incentive Act on a first-come, first-served basis. Beginning with fiscal 2019, and for each fiscal year thereafter, the Governor must include in the State budget an appropriation of \$1 million to FCFF to be distributed as public contributions under the Act.

A participating candidate receives public financing in the form of matching funds, only for a contested election, for eligible contributions received by the participating candidate, as shown in **Exhibit 1**. "Eligible contribution" means a contribution or series of contributions of up to \$250 from a single individual residing in a candidate's constituency. "Eligible contribution" does not include a contribution from a business entity, a political party, a regulated lobbyist, the campaign finance entity of a candidate, a political action committee, or any other political committee.

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**Exhibit 1**  
**Matching Funds Ratios and Limits**

*Matching Fund Ratios (Applicable to All Candidates)*

<u>Eligible Contribution Amount</u>	<u>Matching Fund Ratio</u>
Up to \$50	3-to-1
\$50-\$150	2-to-1
Greater Than \$150	2-to-1

*Matching Fund Limits*

<u>Candidate(s)</u>	<u>Primary</u>	<u>General</u>	<u>Total</u>
Senate	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$100,000
House of Delegates	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$70,000

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CFD must alter, by regulation, the matching fund limits for the election cycle beginning January 1, 2023, and for each subsequent election cycle, based on the rate of inflation.

Participating candidates may choose specified alternative apportionments of the total matching fund limit, between the primary and general election, to receive more matching funds for one election and less for the other.

The bill specifies times and procedures for disbursements of matching funds from FCFF to participating candidates prior to the primary and general elections, and the subsequent return of any unspent funds.

The bill also specifies the procedure for a participating candidate to opt out of the public financing system, provides for judicial review of a CFD action under the Act (with the exception of a determination whether a candidate is eligible for public financing), and specifies prohibited actions and related penalties and sanctions.

**Current Law/Background:**

*Public Financing Act and Fair Campaign Financing Fund*

PFA provides for a system of public financing of elections for candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor. The Act established FCFF and the fund is administered by the

Comptroller. An income tax checkoff on the individual income tax return form that allowed an individual to contribute up to \$500 to the fund on the individual's tax return was repealed under the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2010 (Chapter 484). Chapter 312 of 2015, however, reinstated a tax checkoff on the individual income tax return form without a limit on the amount of contributions that may be made and it also established certain other sources of revenue for the fund, including various penalties, fines, and fees imposed under State election law.

To qualify for public funding under PFA, a gubernatorial ticket must raise "seed money" equal to 10% of the expenditure limit for eligible tickets in the election. The expenditure limit is calculated for each election using a formula based on the population of the State and inflation. The limit applies separately to each primary and general election. For 2014, the expenditure limit was \$2,586,124. Accordingly, the amount of seed money a qualifying ticket was required to raise in 2014 was \$258,612.

Seed money must be raised in the form of "eligible private contributions," which are contributions of \$250 or less from individuals. Contributions from business entities or political committees do not qualify as eligible private contributions. Once a ticket has qualified by raising seed money, public funds are disbursed for the primary election on a matching basis. For a ticket with opposition, the ticket receives \$1 in public funds for each \$1 in eligible private contributions it raises. For a ticket without opposition, the ticket receives \$1 in public funds for each \$3 in eligible private contributions it raises. A participating ticket may accept contributions of more than \$250 or contributions from business entities or political committees, but these funds are not seed money, may not be matched with public funds, and count toward the ticket's expenditure limit for the election.

If a participating ticket wins the primary election, it is entitled to receive public funds for the general election equal to the expenditure limit for the election. There is no requirement to raise eligible private contributions to receive public funds for the general election. Any private contributions a participating ticket raises in the general election will count toward its expenditure limit for the election and correspondingly reduce the amount of public funds the ticket may spend. Expenditures by the State or local central committee of a political party that are coordinated with a participating ticket do not count toward the expenditure limit.

With the exception of the 1994 gubernatorial election, the public financing program under PFA had not been used until recently. Beginning in 2009, following multiple election cycles without use of the public financing program, the General Assembly authorized certain amounts of money in the fund to be used for other election-related purposes. In the 2014 election, two gubernatorial tickets qualified for public financing under the program and collectively received a total of approximately \$3.69 million.

As of late January 2017, the balance in FCFF is \$2.67 million.

## *Public Campaign Financing*

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 13 states provide some form of public financing option for campaigns. Those programs are voluntary and limit campaign spending by those who elect to receive public funds. In most of the 13 states, the participating candidates' campaigns are only partially funded with public funds. A few states, however, provide full public financing to candidates.

## *Commission to Study Campaign Finance Law*

The Commission to Study Campaign Finance Law, formed by the General Assembly in 2011, addressed the issue of public campaign financing in its December 2012 report. With respect to public financing of General Assembly candidates, while some members of the commission supported establishing at least a pilot program, agreement could not be reached on how to fund such a program. The commission agreed instead to recommend that the General Assembly authorize the counties (including Baltimore City) to establish public financing programs for county offices to foster possible further exploration of public financing in the State outside of the current gubernatorial program. Chapter 419 of 2013, the Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013, includes such an authorization, effective January 1, 2015. Montgomery County became the first county to exercise the authority when it enacted a law in October 2014 that establishes a system that provides matching funds for county executive and county council candidates.

For the commission's full discussion of public financing, see pages 22-25 of the commission's [2012 report](#).

## **State Fiscal Effect:**

### *Administration of Public Financing System*

General fund expenditures increase by at least \$340,905 in fiscal 2018, and by similar amounts in future years to administer the public financing system established by the bill, which reflects:

- the cost of SBE hiring (1) one staff person and one office secretary in fiscal 2018 to assist in the implementation and administration of the program; (2) an attorney in fiscal 2018 to develop educational materials and enforcement and auditing procedures; and (3) an investigator, mid-way through fiscal 2018, to conduct auditing and investigations; and
- software programming to accommodate the new public financing program in the State's online campaign finance reporting system.

The estimate includes salaries, fringe benefits, and one-time and ongoing operating expenses.

Positions	4
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$270,747
Software Programming	50,000
Operating Expenses	<u>20,158</u>
<b>Total FY 2018 State Expenditures</b>	<b>\$340,905</b>

Future year expenditures reflect full salaries with annual increases and employee turnover and ongoing operating expenses.

Other costs, such as those associated with developing an education program, have not been quantified.

#### *Public Financing of Campaigns*

General fund expenditures increase by \$1 million in fiscal 2019 and future fiscal years in accordance with the bill's requirement that such funding be appropriated to FCFF. Special fund revenues increase correspondingly, reflecting receipt of that funding by FCFF. Special fund expenditures increase in fiscal 2018 and 2019, and in future years in which gubernatorial elections occur, to provide public financing to participating candidates. The extent of special fund expenditures depends on the amount of available money in FCFF and the level of participation in the program. The bill requires an initial limit on the number of participating candidates during an election cycle to be established, but the system also must allow for an increase or decrease in the number of participating candidates in correlation to the amount of money in FCFF.

For fiscal 2018, it is assumed that matching funding under the program is provided from the current FCFF balance of \$2.7 million (but potentially only a portion of the fund's balance may be available to General Assembly candidates, as opposed to gubernatorial tickets under PFA).

#### *Penalty Provisions*

It is assumed, for the purposes of this fiscal and policy note, that the bill's penalty provisions and other provisions authorizing court action will not materially affect State finances.

## Additional Information

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** State Board of Elections; Comptroller's Office; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Budget and Management; National Conference of State Legislatures; Department of Legislative Services

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