

# SENATE BILL 781

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CF HB 949

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By: **Senator Zucker**

Introduced and read first time: February 3, 2020

Assigned to: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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## A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Election Law – Disclosure of Qualifying Paid Digital Communications –**  
3 **Revisions**

4 FOR the purpose of repealing a requirement that an online platform maintain and make  
5 available to the State Board of Elections on request certain records regarding certain  
6 qualifying paid digital communications that a purchaser requests to disseminate  
7 through the online platform; requiring an online platform to maintain and make  
8 available to the State Board on request, within a certain time period and for at least  
9 a certain number of years, certain records regarding certain qualifying paid digital  
10 communications that a purchaser requests to disseminate through the online  
11 platform; and generally relating to disclosure of qualifying paid digital  
12 communications.

13 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,  
14 Article – Election Law  
15 Section 1–101(a), (dd–1), and (ll–1) and 13–405.1  
16 Annotated Code of Maryland  
17 (2017 Replacement Volume and 2019 Supplement)

18 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,  
19 Article – Election Law  
20 Section 13–405  
21 Annotated Code of Maryland  
22 (2017 Replacement Volume and 2019 Supplement)

23 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
24 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

25 **Article – Election Law**

26 1–101.

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



1 (a) In this article the following words have the meanings indicated unless a  
2 different meaning is clearly intended from the context.

3 (dd-1) "Online platform" means any public-facing website, web application, or digital  
4 application, including a social network, ad network, or search engine, that:

5 (1) has 100,000 or more unique monthly United States visitors or users for  
6 a majority of months during the immediately preceding 12 months; and

7 (2) receives payment for qualifying paid digital communications.

8 (ll-1) "Qualifying paid digital communication" means any electronic communication  
9 that:

10 (1) is campaign material;

11 (2) is placed or promoted for a fee on an online platform;

12 (3) is disseminated to 500 or more individuals; and

13 (4) does not propose a commercial transaction.

14 13-405.

15 (a) (1) A person who directly or indirectly requests placement of a qualifying  
16 paid digital communication on an online platform shall expressly notify the online platform  
17 at the time the request for placement of a qualifying paid digital communication is made  
18 that the communication is a qualifying paid digital communication.

19 (2) The notice required under paragraph (1) of this subsection:

20 (i) shall be provided using the method prescribed by the online  
21 platform; and

22 (ii) may not be provided through the inclusion of the authority line  
23 required under § 13-401 of this subtitle on the qualifying paid digital communication.

24 (3) If an online platform does not provide a method for a requester of a  
25 qualifying paid digital communication to give notice as required by paragraph (2)(i) of this  
26 subsection, the requester shall:

27 (i) notify the State Board that the online platform is not in  
28 compliance with paragraph (2)(i) of this subsection; and

29 (ii) provide the information required under subsection (b)(6) of this  
30 section to the State Board.

1 (b) (1) An online platform shall make available for public inspection on the  
2 Internet in a machine-readable format the records described in paragraph (6) of this  
3 subsection regarding qualifying paid digital communications disseminated through the  
4 online platform for which the online platform has received notice in accordance with  
5 subsection (a) of this section.

6 (2) An online platform shall allow the public to search the records described  
7 in paragraph (6) of this subsection by purchaser.

8 (3) Except as provided in paragraph (5) of this subsection, the records  
9 described in paragraph (6) of this subsection shall be available for public inspection on the  
10 Internet in a clearly identifiable location on the online platform's website:

11 (i) within 48 hours after a qualifying paid digital communication is  
12 purchased; and

13 (ii) for at least 1 year after the general election following the date  
14 when the online platform disseminated the qualifying paid digital communication to which  
15 the records relate.

16 (4) For purposes of paragraph (3) of this subsection, a person shall be  
17 considered to have purchased a qualifying paid digital communication if the person has  
18 executed a contract to purchase a qualifying paid digital communication.

19 (5) (i) An online platform may apply to the State Board for a compliance  
20 waiver to allow the online platform to make the records described in paragraph (6) of this  
21 subsection available for public inspection on the Internet within up to 7 days after a  
22 qualifying paid digital communication is purchased.

23 (ii) The State Board shall require an applicant for a compliance  
24 waiver under subparagraph (i) of this paragraph to:

25 1. describe why complying with the requirements under  
26 paragraph (3) of this subsection presents an unreasonable burden on the applicant; and

27 2. present measures the applicant will take to meet the  
28 requirements under paragraph (3) of this subsection within 6 months after the date the  
29 compliance waiver is granted.

30 (iii) The State Board may not grant:

31 1. more than one compliance waiver to an online platform;  
32 and

33 2. a compliance waiver to an online platform within 30 days  
34 before an election.

1 (iv) A compliance waiver is not effective during the 30 days  
2 immediately preceding an election.

3 (v) If an online platform will apply for a compliance waiver under  
4 subparagraph (i) of this paragraph, the online platform shall apply for the compliance  
5 waiver before receiving payment for a qualifying paid digital communication.

6 (6) For each qualifying paid digital communication a purchaser requests to  
7 disseminate through an online platform and for which the purchaser has provided notice  
8 in accordance with subsection (a) of this section, the online platform shall maintain the  
9 following records:

10 (i) for each qualifying paid digital communication purchased by a  
11 political committee:

12 1. the name of the person and any contact information for the  
13 person required by the State Board, of the political committee;

14 2. the treasurer of the political committee; and

15 3. the total amount paid by the purchaser to the online  
16 platform for the placement of the qualifying paid digital communication;

17 (ii) for each qualifying paid digital communication purchased by a  
18 person other than a political committee or an ad network:

19 1. the name of the person and any contact information for the  
20 person required by the State Board, of the person;

21 2. the identity of the individuals exercising direction or  
22 control over the activities of the person, including the chief executive officer or board of  
23 directors, if applicable; and

24 3. the total amount paid by the purchaser to the online  
25 platform for the placement of the qualifying paid digital communication; and

26 (iii) for each qualifying paid digital communication purchased by an  
27 ad network:

28 1. the contact information for the ad network; or

29 2. a hyperlink to the ad network's website where the contact  
30 information is located.

31 [(c) (1) An online platform shall maintain and make available to the State  
32 Board on request the records described in paragraph (3) of this subsection regarding

1 qualifying paid digital communications disseminated through the online platform for which  
2 the online platform has received notice in accordance with subsection (a) of this section.

3 (2) The records described in paragraph (3) of this subsection shall be  
4 available on the request of the State Board:

5 (i) within 48 hours after a qualifying paid digital communication is  
6 first disseminated on the online platform; and

7 (ii) for at least 1 year after the general election following the date  
8 when the online platform disseminated the qualifying paid digital communication to which  
9 the records relate.

10 (3) For each qualifying paid digital communication a purchaser requests to  
11 disseminate through an online platform and for which the purchaser has provided notice  
12 in accordance with subsection (a) of this section, the online platform shall maintain the  
13 following records:

14 (i) the candidate or ballot issue to which the qualifying paid digital  
15 communication relates and whether the qualifying paid digital communication supports or  
16 opposes that candidate or ballot issue;

17 (ii) the dates and times that the qualifying paid digital  
18 communication was first disseminated and last disseminated;

19 (iii) a digital copy of the content of the qualifying paid digital  
20 communication;

21 (iv) an approximate description of the geographic locations where the  
22 qualifying paid digital communication was disseminated;

23 (v) an approximate description of the audience that received or was  
24 targeted to receive the qualifying paid digital communication; and

25 (vi) the total number of impressions generated by the qualifying paid  
26 digital communication.]

27 **(C) (1) FOR EACH QUALIFYING PAID DIGITAL COMMUNICATION A**  
28 **PURCHASER REQUESTS TO DISSEMINATE THROUGH AN ONLINE PLATFORM AND FOR**  
29 **WHICH THE PURCHASER HAS PROVIDED NOTICE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SUBSECTION**  
30 **(A) OF THIS SECTION, THE ONLINE PLATFORM SHALL:**

31 **(I) MAINTAIN THE RECORDS REGARDING THE QUALIFYING**  
32 **PAID DIGITAL COMMUNICATION THAT THE ONLINE PLATFORM MAINTAINS IN THE**  
33 **ORDINARY COURSE OF ITS BUSINESS OF SELLING ANY FORM OF ADVERTISING ON**  
34 **THE ONLINE PLATFORM; AND**

1                   **(II) MAKE THE RECORDS DESCRIBED IN ITEM (I) OF THIS**  
2 **PARAGRAPH AVAILABLE TO THE STATE BOARD ON REQUEST:**

3                   **1. WITHIN 48 HOURS AFTER THE QUALIFYING PAID**  
4 **DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IS FIRST DISSEMINATED ON THE ONLINE PLATFORM; AND**

5                   **2. FOR AT LEAST 1 YEAR AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTION**  
6 **IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE DATE ON WHICH THE ONLINE PLATFORM**  
7 **DISSEMINATED THE QUALIFYING PAID DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TO WHICH THE**  
8 **RECORDS RELATE.**

9                   **[(5)] (2)** Information obtained by the State Board under this subsection is  
10 not subject to inspection under the Public Information Act.

11                   (d) (1) A purchaser of a qualifying paid digital communication shall provide  
12 the online platform that disseminates the qualifying paid digital communication with the  
13 information necessary for the online platform to comply with subsections (b) and (c) of this  
14 section.

15                   (2) An online platform may rely in good faith on the information provided  
16 by a purchaser of a qualifying paid digital communication to comply with subsections (b)  
17 and (c) of this section.

18                   (e) An online platform shall make reasonable efforts to allow the State Board to:

19                   (1) obtain the information required under subsections (b) and (c) of this  
20 section;

21                   (2) obtain the information that a purchaser of a qualifying paid digital  
22 communication provided to the online platform in accordance with subsection (d) of this  
23 section; and

24                   (3) otherwise request that a purchaser of a qualifying paid digital  
25 communication comply with this section or § 13–401 of this subtitle.

26                   (f) An online platform that disseminates qualifying paid digital communications  
27 shall make reasonable efforts, in accordance with the federal Stored Communications Act,  
28 to comply with any subpoena that is issued in connection with an investigation concerning  
29 the compliance of a purchaser of a qualifying paid digital communication with this section  
30 or § 13–401 of this subtitle.

31 13–405.1.

32                   (a) (1) The State Administrator may investigate a potential violation of §  
33 13–401 or § 13–405 of this subtitle by a purchaser of a qualifying paid digital

1 communication.

2 (2) In furtherance of an investigation under paragraph (1) of this  
3 subsection, the State Administrator may issue a subpoena for the attendance of a witness  
4 to testify or the production of records.

5 (3) A subpoena issued under this subsection shall be served in accordance  
6 with the Maryland Rules.

7 (4) If a person fails to comply with a subpoena issued under this subsection,  
8 on petition of the State Administrator, a circuit court of competent jurisdiction may compel  
9 compliance with the subpoena.

10 (b) (1) At the conclusion of an investigation under subsection (a)(1) of this  
11 section, subject to paragraph (2) of this subsection, the State Board may request that the  
12 Attorney General institute an action in a circuit court for injunctive relief in accordance  
13 with the Maryland Rules to:

14 (i) require a purchaser of a qualifying paid digital communication  
15 to comply with § 13–401 or § 13–405 of this subtitle; or

16 (ii) require an online platform to remove a qualified paid digital  
17 communication that does not comply with § 13–401 of this subtitle or if the purchaser of  
18 the communication does not comply with § 13–405 of this subtitle.

19 (2) Before requesting that the Attorney General seek an injunction under  
20 paragraph (1) of this subsection, the State Board shall:

21 (i) notify a purchaser of a qualifying paid digital communication  
22 who is the subject of an investigation of the circumstances that gave rise to the  
23 investigation; and

24 (ii) provide the person reasonable opportunity to be heard at a public  
25 meeting of the State Board.

26 (3) A circuit court may grant injunctive relief under this subsection only if  
27 the Attorney General shows by clear and convincing evidence that a violation of § 13–401  
28 or § 13–405 of this subtitle is being committed.

29 (4) A person who violates an injunction issued under this subsection is  
30 subject to the penalties provided in § 13–605(b) of this title.

31 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June  
32 1, 2020.