

March 4, 2020

To: Chair and Members of the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

From: Henry Bogdan, Public Policy Director

Re: Senate Bill 1028 – Balancing the State Budget

Position: **Support**

Maryland Nonprofits supports Senate Bill 1028 and its proposed amendment to the Maryland Constitution that would grant the General Assembly at least a modicum of the budgetary power that many state legislatures may exercise for their constituents.

The General Assembly may be the weakest state legislature in the country in terms of its authority to direct public spending. For 100 years the state's budgetary power has been concentrated in the Executive. This is not only the authority to include or increase items in the executive budget, but by virtue of statute, to also reduce appropriations approved by the General Assembly, including most statutory mandates, by vote of the Board of Public Works.

Senate Bill 1028 would allow the voters of Maryland to vest in their locally-elected representatives in the House of Delegates and State Senate at least some power to re-direct program spending proposed by the Governor in the Budget Bill. It is important to remember that this amendment does not include any power to raise the overall level of spending.

In the absence of this authority, the only power of the legislature, theoretically the people's policy-making body, to prioritize the use of state funds is by "mandating" expenditures in a future budget

As a very practical matter, members of the General Assembly, elected from districts that each represent slightly more than 2% of the state's population, are clearly more easily accessible, and more accountable, to the people than the Governor of the State. The lack of greater balance in budgetary power reduces the practical influence and engagement of citizens, individually or through associations, on decisions regarding the use of public funds and the priorities of their state government.

For these reasons we strongly urge a **favorable report** on Senate Bill 1028.