

**MGA-SenKelley\_FAV\_SB0348**

Uploaded by: Senator Kelley, Senator Kelley

Position: FAV

**TESTIMONY OF SENATOR DELORES G. KELLEY**

**REGARDING SENATE BILL 348 - PUBLIC ETHICS - OFFICIALS AND LOBBYISTS -  
REPORTING OF CEREMONIAL GIFTS AND AWARDS OF INSIGNIFICANT  
MONETARY VALUE**

**BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**ON FEBRUARY 20, 2020**

**Mr. Chairman and Members:**

**On the evening before the start of the 2018 opening of the General Assembly, I received a plaque at a public reception of the Women Legislators of Maryland Foundation. The plaque was presented by the Maryland Commission for Women.**

**Several months later, I was advised by the Maryland Ethics Commission that I was out of compliance with the Ethics law because of failing to report my receipt of the plaque, which the donor organization had reported as having a value of \$106.00 (one hundred, six dollars).**

**I was required therefore to amend my most recent ethics report, using the value of the “gift”, as reported to me by the Ethics Commission staff. I had no independent knowledge of the value of the plaque, never requested it and received the Ceremonial “gift”, at the Calvert House in Annapolis, in the presence of dozens of legislators and at least 150 members of the public.**

**After being subsequently notified by the Ethics Commission that my failure to report the value of this “gift” was a violation of Maryland’s Ethics law, I decided to discuss the situation with the Ethics Counsel to the General Assembly, who advised that I might want to seek a legislative remedy, so that a member’s acceptance of a “ceremonial gift” would not be subject to required reporting to the Ethics Commission. Senate Bill 348 is here to serve that function, and I therefore urge your favorable report of Senate Bill 348.**

# **SB 348 - Common Cause MD - Unfavorable**

Uploaded by: ANTOINE, JOANNE

Position: UNF

February 20, 2020

**Testimony on SB 348**  
**Public Ethics - Officials and Lobbyists - Reporting of Ceremonial Gifts and**  
**Awards of Insignificant Monetary Value**  
**Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs**

**Position: Unfavorable**

Common Cause Maryland opposes SB 348 which would roll back transparency and oversight of the legislature.

Strong ethics and transparency laws are essential to building a foundation of trust in government action and provides the public with the tools to provide oversight. Under current law, an official must file an annual financial disclosure statement with the State Ethics Board and that statement must disclose gifts received that are of a value of \$20 or more. Semiannually, lobbyists must include on their reports the name of each official, employee, or immediate family member of an official or employee who has benefited from one or more gifts with a cumulative value of \$75.

These disclosure thresholds ensure gifts are designed to impair impartiality and independent judgment of officials are not being accepted and this information being made available to the public gives them faith that officials are acting in their best interests. Ceremonial gifts and awards under these thresholds do not currently have to be disclosed. Those ceremonial gifts and awards over \$20, while possibly not of much greater value compared to this threshold, should be disclosed. Standardized disclosure reporting ensures thorough disclosure in the legislature.

SB 348 reduces ethical oversight and increases the avenues through which wealthy interests may influence elected officials. This would be a step backwards for ethics and transparency in Maryland when we should be building voter trust and confidence in the political process.

We respectfully urge an unfavorable report on SB 348.