

February 20, 2020

Testimony on SB 947
Public Financing Act - State Senate and House of Delegates Candidates
and Matching Fund Revisions
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 947, which would create a small donor matching system for General Assembly candidates so that they can run free from the influence of wealthy donors.

Since the disastrous *Citizens United* decision and its progeny, America's elections have become deluged with outside spending. Wealthy interests have driven up the cost to compete in elections at every level, boxing out candidates who do not have wealthy benefactors but do have support in their communities. Those that can make it through this money gauntlet, must then spend increasingly large percentages of their work days - time that should be spent legislating and hearing the concerns of constituents - on the phone chasing big-money donors.

Maryland is no different. In our 2019 study, we analyzed fundraising by winning legislators and found that fundraising expectations for candidates continue to rise. From the years 2015-2018, Senators, on average, received a contribution total of \$266,000.00. This amount of contributions was a slight decrease from the 2014 election cycle, but it is still a significant amount of money raised for state senate seats on average. Delegates received an average contribution total of \$125,499.00, which is a 64% increase from the 2014 election where the average amount fundraised was \$79,878.00.

Maryland should be concerned about the rise in candidate fundraising totals. When the cost to run for office is high, candidates often need to rely on mega donors or corporate interests to be competitive. SB 947, the Public Financing Act, would help to alleviate many of these problems by amplifying the voices of regular Marylanders and giving candidates they support the ability to compete with others backed by big-money interests.

Candidates opting into the public financing program would first have to show sufficient community interest by raising small donations from Maryland voters, refraining from taking donations from non-individuals and for donations above \$250. Once they meet qualifying thresholds, at least 250 eligible contributions totaling at \$15,000 for State Senators and at least 150 eligible donations totaling \$15,000 for State Delegates, and the State Board of Elections authorizes the distribution of money after verifying that they have qualified, they would then be matched by funds from the Fair Campaign Financing Fund, at a rate of 6-to-1 or 2-to-1, depending on the size of the contribution, with no match provided for the last \$100. Candidates for State Senator would be eligible to receive \$150,000 per election and candidates for State Delegate eligible for \$90,000 per elections, amounts that we believe would ensure candidates are able to run competitive campaigns in any part of the state.

Because SB 947 could significantly raise the voices of regular Marylanders to compete with the big-money spending unleashed by *Citizens United*, we ask the committee for a favorable report.



Summary of Public Financing Act as Drafted

Threshold to Qualify for Small Donor Matching Program		
	Senate	Delegate
Number of Donations	250	150
Amount of Donations	\$15,000	\$7,500
*Must forgo contributions greater than \$250 and only accept contributions from individuals (no money from corporations, unions, PACs, etc.). Multiple contributions from one person cannot exceed \$250.		

Match Ratios		
	Senate	Delegate
First \$50	6 to 1	6 to 1
\$51-\$150	2 to 1	2 to 1
\$250 cap	Accepted, no match	
*Only contributions from Maryland voters are matched. No match provided for last \$100.		

	Senate	Delegate
Match Cap	\$150,000	\$90,000
*Once the cap is reached, candidates can continue to raise donations from individuals of \$250 or less but will not receive any matching funds. The match cap is per election.		

Example Candidate Performance		
	Total Raised if Candidates Reach Program Cap	Donors & Amount to Reach Program Cap
Senate	\$187,500 (\$150,000 match + \$37,500)	Raise \$100 donations from 375 donors
Delegate	\$110,000 (\$90,000 match + \$20,000)	Raise \$80 donations from 250 donors

AVERAGE CONTRIBUTION TOTALS

MARYLAND SENATORS AND DELEGATES, 2015-2018

Maryland

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$266,934.14
House of Delegates	\$125,499.00

Western Maryland

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$53,339.97
House of Delegates	\$56,139.36

Allegany & Garrett Counties (District 1)

Senate	\$59,902.24
House of Delegates	\$61,680.48

Washington County (District 1,2)

Senate	\$40,213.62
House of Delegates	\$73,304.60

Capital Region

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$256,059.09
House of Delegates	\$93,122.82

Frederick County (District 3,4)

Senate	\$271,355.40
House of Delegates	\$52,056.39

Montgomery County (District 14-20,39)

Senate	\$207,046.48
House of Delegates	\$108,138.16

Prince George's County (District 21-27,47)

Senate	\$409,775.38
House of Delegates	\$119,173.91

Central Maryland

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$252,343.21
House of Delegates	\$139,957.99

Anne Arundel County (District 21,30-33)

Senate	\$243,789.80
House of Delegates	\$234,264.36

Baltimore County (District 6-8,10-12,42,44)

Senate	\$290,247.51
House of Delegates	\$135,630.77

Baltimore City (District 40,41,43-46)

Senate	\$247,511.70
House of Delegates	\$189,113.09

Carroll County (District 4,5,9)

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$262,730.21
House of Delegates	\$62,765.66

Harford County (District 7,34,35)

Senate	\$195,138.65
House of Delegates	\$108,149.89

Howard County (District 9,12,13)

Senate	\$274,642.56
House of Delegates	\$109,824.14

Eastern Shore

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$259,786.06
House of Delegates	\$85,469.64

Caroline County (District 36,37)

Senate	\$210,976.39
House of Delegates	\$45,228.33

Cecil County (District 35,36)

Senate	\$149,309.69
House of Delegates	\$44,818.33

Dorchester & Talbot County (District 37)

Senate	\$123,778.40
House of Delegates	\$171,150.38

Kent & Queen Anne's County (District 36)

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$298,174.37
House of Delegates	\$45,228.33

Somerset & Worcester County (District 38)

Senate	\$428,797.50
House of Delegates	\$45,006.00

Wicomico County (District 37,38)

Senate	\$276,287.95
House of Delegates	\$123,884.75

Southern Maryland

Body of General Assembly	Average Contribution Total Received
Senate	\$512,650.62
House of Delegates	\$83,221.20

Calvert County (District 27,29)

Senate	\$451,849.93
House of Delegates	\$99,328.96

Charles County (District 27,28)

Senate	\$945,194.44
House of Delegates	\$48,622.42

St. Mary's County (District 29)

Senate	\$140,907.48
House of Delegates	\$101,712.22