

GET MONEY OUT

Maryland

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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 947
PUBLIC FINANCING ACT – STATE SENATE AND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
CANDIDATE AND MATCHING FUND REVISIONS**

February 20, 2020

Get Money Out (GMOM) is an all-volunteer organization that was established just over seven years ago. We now have more than 8,400 citizen supporters. We work in Maryland toward the goals that all citizens should have equal access to the ballot and an equal say in governance.

The United States has endured several decades of the vicious cycle of big-money campaign financing, high-dollar lobbying, and policies that promote economic inequality. The percentage of wealth and income held by the top 1% has skyrocketed during this era while working families have not shared in the growth of the economy.

According to CNBC: “The top 1% saw their share of wealth rise to 38.6% in 2016 [while] the share of wealth held by the bottom 90% of Americans has been falling steadily for 25 years, hitting 22.8% in 2016 from 33.2% in 1989.”ⁱ Elections cost too much for candidates but nothing compared to the accumulated wealth of the new aristocracy.

The decade since the *Citizens United v. FEC* decision has exacerbated everything bad about the vicious cycle. A billion dollars of dark money has flowed through federal campaigns, and now we are more susceptible than ever to foreign sources of campaign spending. PACS and SuperPACs can spend unlimited sums on false advertising – now multiplied by Internet platforms faster than fact-checkers can keep pace. In the 2018 mid-term federal elections, just ten families were responsible for 7% of all spending.

We are seeing yet another ominous milestone in the convergence of negative impacts of the presidential campaign of Michael Bloomberg.

- Although we are still 8-1/2 month out from the November election, Bloomberg has already broken the record for TV advertising by spending \$338 million.
- He is buying up the pool of GOTV and field operatives by offering previously-unheard-of amounts. Under the headline, “Mike Bloomberg Is Hiring So Many Operatives, Local and State Campaigns Are Starving for Help,” we learn that “The salaries being paid to Bloomberg staffers are well above market rates, and often

come with housing included, as well as a laptop and an iPhone....The Bloomberg campaign is offering field organizers, or FOs) [\\$6,000 per](#) month and guaranteed pay through November....”ⁱⁱ

- A candidate for a Connecticut House seat lost a special election by 79 votes after her campaign manager was hired by Bloomberg less than 3 weeks before election day.

We are not criticizing Mr. Bloomberg as a candidate, but we strongly believe that no one person should be able to wield this much power. The essence of democracy is equality among citizens. The present level of economic inequality – combined with our corrupt campaign finance system, voter suppression campaigns, and the attribution of constitutional rights to artificial entities (such as unions and corporations) – threatens to destroy our system of democratic republicanism.

Senate Bill 947 is a major step forward on leveling the playing field so that talented and civic-minded people of all economic backgrounds have a fair chance to be elected to the Senate or House of Delegates. The bill would help makes small donors – i. e., voters – matter much more. Candidates would have a real incentive to talk to voters and get small donations, which would then be matched by a multiple from the Fair Campaign Financing Fund. The smallest donations would be multiplied the most.

This bill carries a substantial fiscal note, and it would represent a major change in the way we finance our campaigns for the State legislature. But we believe that the threats to democracy that we have seen since the *Citizens United v. FEC* decision will broaden and deepen. Dark money, foreign money, and SuperPACs with massive financial power will come to Maryland. This will become a crisis that must be addressed as a high priority of State government. The cost is approximately 0.2% of the State’s general fund revenues. We urgently request a favorable report.

ⁱ <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/27/the-top-1-percent-of-americans-now-control-38-percent-of-the-wealth.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/13/bloomberg-spending-local-state-campaigns/>