



Testimony on HB34

Ways and Means, January 28th, 2020

Campaign Finance - Contributions, Expenditures, or Donations by Foreign-Influenced Corporations or Foreign Principals

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Maryland PIRG is a state based, citizen funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state and a student funded, student directed chapter at the University of Maryland College Park. For forty years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.

We need to create a campaign finance system where every Marylander, regardless of wealth has more or less equal opportunity to influence the actions of our government. To build political equity in our democracy, campaign contributions should be limited to what the average Marylander can afford, and campaign funds should come from Marylanders – not foreign interests, out of state interests, or corporate interests. This bill is a step in that direction.

By restricting contributions from foreign-influenced corporations, we can reduce the risk of and perception that our elected officials are influenced by foreign interests, and help ensure they are accountable to the people of Maryland.

[“Foreign nationals,” including foreign governments, individuals, and businesses are prohibited from spending in any American election, city, state or federal.](#) But, under our current campaign finance system, corporations that are controlled, owned, or partly owned by foreign nationals CAN make contributions to campaigns and ballot committees as well as make independent expenditures. This loophole opens up Maryland’s election system to undue influence from foreign nationals.

While Maryland PIRG strongly supports tighter restrictions on foreign-influenced corporate political contribution, we also believe Maryland should ban **all corporate contributions to campaigns**. We understand this bill does not do so, or intend to do so. There are twenty-two states that prohibit corporations from contributing to political campaigns.ⁱ Unfortunately, Maryland is not yet one of them.

It’s time to start fixing our broken campaign finance system and build a government of, by, and for the people. I urge you to give a favorable report on **HB34**. Thank you.

ⁱ National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/campaign-contribution-limits-overview.aspx>