

**HB1125: Public Financing Act –
Candidate and Matching Fund Revisions (Maryland Fair Elections Act)
Thursday, February 27th, 2020
Ways and Means Committee
FAVORABLE**

Good afternoon, my name is Jon Weinstein. I am a former elected member of the Howard County Council and the lead-sponsor of Howard County's Fair Elections ballot question and enabling legislation which passed in 2016 and 2017, respectively. I'm excited to see so many former Howard County colleagues are sponsoring this bill. My testimony is from the perspective of my Fair Elections experience and as someone with deep concerns for the condition of our democracy.

As a candidate in three elections, I ran as a small business owner with a built-in network and a unique set of experiences. I drew a lot of support from the business community because there are very few business owners who seek or hold elective office. I believe it made fund raising a bit easier, though definitely never much fun. As you know all too well, running an effective campaign takes significant financial resources. This fact is a fiscal and emotional barrier to entry for many people who would otherwise consider running for office. Frankly, it prevents many people from running who would be excellent elected representatives for their communities.

I have talked to elected officials in Baltimore City, Prince George's, Frederick and A the state who have considered similar Fair Elections programs. You may be thinking of the same questions I discussed with them, "*Why do we need this program? We don't have a problem here.*" When I considered putting forward Fair Elections legislation in Howard County, I weighed a few key elements:

1. The fact that I was playing by the rules and would not let contributions influence my decisions.
2. The politics of our time and the abuses of elected officials in other jurisdictions and states, and
3. That passing the charter amendment and enabling legislation would encourage other Maryland counties to join Howard and Montgomery counties and ultimately that if enough counties, established similar Fair Elections programs, that a state-wide program would become a reality.

As I deliberated these elements, I realized the issue wasn't about me or my colleagues who followed the rules. I believe this issue is more about our shared future and the need to repair an election system that the people we represent believe is broken, who's outcomes they don't trust, and that their participation in the electoral process does not make a difference. Too many voters have elected to stay at home rather than exercise their most precious right... to vote.

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I have heard the opposition to this legislation...

- The program redirects money away from other critical needs - Taxes go to pay for the equipment we use to vote, to enable more efficient elections. Providing funds to the actual people running in those elections is a more meaningful and substantive way to improve our elections and restore citizens' faith in the process.
- I don't want my tax dollars going to candidates I don't support - We're paying the politicians once they're elected, so why wouldn't we want to encourage more qualified people to seek elective office by minimizing the barrier to entry.

Politicians shouldn't be paid to campaign - The Maryland Fair Elections program will encourage candidates to seek out wider support among many **Maryland** voters, and not focus on the deep pockets of fewer donors, including people, PACs, and corporations that may only have loose ties to our great state.

The intent of Fair Elections legislation around the country is to return our democracy to the people! This legislation will promote three important goals:

1. Helping people to raise their voices to a level that is equivalent to those with more resources - companies, PACs, and wealthy individuals.
2. Rebuilding trust in the electoral system and the candidates seeking office and showing people that their participation – volunteering, contributing, and voting makes a difference; and,
3. Encouraging citizens interested in serving their community to seek elective public office.

Let me share a personal story... At a poll the night of the vote on the charter amendment in November 2016, a young woman came up to me to explain that she had only dreamed of running for office to serve her community, but thought it out of her reach because, as a new public school teacher she lacked the personal financial resources and network of people who could afford to contribute to a political campaign. With the Fair Elections legislation, that dream was one step closer to reality. This young woman, like to so many other people across our state who have a deep and personal understanding of the issues in their communities, must view becoming an elected representative as a realistic option to serve their communities, not just a dream.

Right now, in the halls of the Maryland Senate there is an exhibit on Maryland's Suffragist history. I believe Fair Elections is part of a modern-day suffrage movement. A critical component of current efforts to reform our electing system to engage and empower more citizens to be more active participants in order to strengthen our precarious democracy.

On a more practical level, I believe by participating in Maryland's Fair Election program, elected officials and candidates alike will spend more **"quality time"** with the people they serve or wish to serve. The multiplying effect on small donations will broaden participation in our political process and shift candidates' actions from **"dialing for dollars,"** which forces them to focus their time on bigger contributions, to spending more time with more constituents to listen to their concerns and interest and communicating their message.

Passing the Maryland Fair Elections Act demonstrate to our state's citizens, that the highest offices in the land are within reach and that their voices and even a small contribution can make a difference.

For these reasons, and many more that you'll hear from other supporters, I urge you to vote favorable on SB 613 – The Maryland Fair Elections Act.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my support for the Maryland Fair Elections Act.

Jon Weinstein