

HB1125: Public Financing Act – Candidate and Matching Fund Revisions (Maryland Fair Elections Act)

Thursday, February 27th, 2020

Ways and Means Committee

FAVORABLE

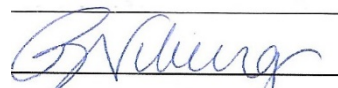
Good afternoon,

My name is Becca Niburg and I serve as one of the organizers for Together We Will Howard County and Together We Will Maryland. I also serve as an at large board member for FIRN and the Howard County branch of the NAACP. I am also an Emerge Maryland graduate. I have spent my career as an immigration attorney advocating for marginalized populations as I specialize in children's claims and female survivors of relationship and sexual violence. I appreciate the Committee's consideration of this matter as well as the opportunity to share why this piece of legislation is so vitally necessary.

Having directed aspects of State Senate, Congressional, and County level campaigns in Maryland in the past couple of cycles, I have seen firsthand the effect of money on both who is able to run and who is able to be successful. As I am sure many of you know, being elected officials yourselves, each candidate must focus on securing funds in order to compete. This focus on raising money means that candidates are not connecting with ordinary voters so much as "dialing for dollars" to those groups and individuals who have the means necessary to donate to a political campaign. Especially in a political climate where many people feel unconnected to their elected representatives and that their voices do not matter in deciding policy, a candidate having to focus on the fundraising aspect reduces the ability to reach out to real people, allowing them to share their experiences and shape policy that reflect their needs.

In addition to the candidate's focus on raising money, the people able to run for office are also curtailed. Could you imagine a single mom with a high school education being able to juggle the time necessary to take care of her ordinary affairs plus engage with voters plus raise money? Such a scenario just is not feasible. And yet, think of how policy might be shaped by having that voice in the room? By someone who could not go to college because of certain barriers (economic, language, discrimination, the reasons for barriers are endless). By someone who experienced the effects of the policies that lawmakers only usually consider based on secondhand accounts. The law and policy we enact as a state would change dramatically with more diverse voices in the room.

I have seen firsthand the pressures of raising money on candidates and among prospective candidates and that pressure is a real barrier to entry and full participation in the electoral process. I urge you to give HB1125 a favorable report to continue to expand the availability of elected officials to people as a whole as increase the voices at the table. Again, I thank you for your time in considering this important matter.



Becca Niburg