

February 27, 2020

Testimony on HB 1222
State Board of Elections - Campaign Finance Enforcement and Compliance - New State Positions
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB1222 which would require the creation of two new state positions for the State Board of Elections (SBE) so they will be adequately staffed to enforce campaign finance violations and to ensure compliance with campaign finance law.

Recently, Marylanders trust in our democracy has been heavily tested by revelations of numerous legislators having violated campaign finance laws. This has led to heightened sensitivity around our current ethics and campaign finance laws and reforms that Maryland needs to consider implementing. Because of this, something we should ensure is that our institutions that are meant to hold power accountable actually have the capacity to do so.

Currently, it is required by Election Law that the State Board (1) have a staff sufficient to perform its functions and (2) receive, or audit, campaign finance reports, account books and records, and various other campaign finance-related reports and records. This law indicates that making sure officials are in compliance with campaign finance laws is a large task and that there is a need for efficient and effective accountability in our elections. More specifically, we need to be careful about putting such a heavy burden on the shoulders of people who will not be able to meet that burden. If we do not make sure the State Board of Elections is effectively staffed, we are setting ourselves up for failure and more deception by bad actors.

Corruption and the appearance of corruption is detrimental faith in our democracy and public participation. We have to be proactive about holding power accountable.

We urge a favorable report.