

Feb 16 2021

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing in favor of SB0415 and SB0416 and public campaign financing programs at every level of government. Studies have shown that not only does it reduce the influence of big business and PACs on our candidates' decisions, but it increases voter involvement and turnout, encourages candidates to run voter-centered campaigns and increases the number and the diversity of candidates. In this testimony I would like to illustrate the need for this type of election fund by discussing some of the spending that took place in the 2018 election cycle. The data described herein was obtained from <https://campaignfinance.maryland.gov/>.

WISE (Women Indivisible Strong Effective) is a group of over 700 women from AACo who reside primarily in District 33. In 2018 WISE monitored campaign donations and spending and tried to expand disclosure about the type and amounts of funding that our local candidates were accepting. Incumbents had funds rolled over from past election cycles that were available for immediate expenditure. For example, Jerry Walker, a sitting Anne Arundel county council member at the time, was able to accumulate almost \$200,000 to enter the D33 delegate race, with Del. Sid Saab in second place with almost \$70,000. Four D33 challengers (all women that did not hold any kind of public office at the time), were barely breaking \$5,000 at that same point. Jerry Walker obtained 68% of his donations from businesses, while incumbent delegates Tony McConkey and Sid Saab had 18% and 25% from businesses, respectively. Although the donor profiles changed some by November, it was clear that incumbents had a major advantage due to their business contacts. The fact that sitting county and state officials draw donations from businesses is no surprise, as they are often making decisions that affect those businesses.

In the 2018 D33 delegate race where seven candidates were running for three seats, it turned out that the losing challengers were only 0.6 and 1.2% of the total votes behind the least favored successful incumbent (Del. Saab). If those challengers were not ultimately outspent by Del. Saab by *five to one*, one of them could have easily won his seat. (Senator Reilly outspent his challenger seven to one.)

We support public campaign financing as proposed in SB0415 and SB0416 as a way to lessen the influence of big money on election outcomes. As the public becomes more educated about what it means to be a small donor candidate, it is our belief that candidates will take part in this program not because it will provide financing levels that will compete with corporate donations, but because voters will be using the small donor nature of the candidate's financials as a litmus test for who they are willing to support. A public donor fund will ultimately create a more diverse field of candidates who are accountable to the individual voter.

Thank you for all you do for Maryland,
Dr. Michelle Koul
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