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Testimony in Support of SB 415:

Public Financing Act - State Senate and House of Delegates Candidates and Matching Fund Revisions

TO: Sen. Pinsky, Chair, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
FROM: Jennifer Dwyer, Deputy Executive Director
DATE: February 18th, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 415. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with over 125,000 members and supporters statewide. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

Fundraising is often one of the most difficult and least enjoyable tasks of an elected official's campaign. SB 415 provides an additional, opt-in path for candidates running to become members of the General Assembly to raise the funds required to run for office by establishing a small donor campaign finance program. By turning ordinary residents into major donors to a campaign, SB 415 benefits residents by encouraging candidates to spend more time engaging one-on-one with them and empowering residents to make significant contributions to their favorite candidates to help them get elected.

The program also benefits candidates by allowing them the freedom to focus on serving and interacting with residents throughout their campaign and after their election without feeling forced to split their time between traditional fundraising and earning votes. Montgomery County's Fair Elections program for County Executive and Council was used by a number of incumbents running for reelection who had formerly fundraised in the traditional manner but preferred this new system. The Montgomery County program has also proven very popular with residents.

For a relatively low cost of a few dollars per resident per year, small donor programs multiply \$10, \$25, or \$50 donations from residents several times over. Increasing the impact of grassroots donations in this way encourages greater participation from residents in local elections and frees up considerable time for candidates and elected officials to serve the people of Maryland. Just as we pay for poll workers and voting machines, this is a critical investment in the health of our democracy.

Progressive Maryland believes that public financing of elections is a win-win for voters and for candidates. We encourage a favorable report on SB 415.



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TO: Sen. Pinsky, Chair, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
FROM: Becca Chilbert, Progressive Maryland Fair Elections Task Force Member, Anne Arundel County (D33)
DATE: February 18th, 2021
POSITION: Support

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Having public financing for state senators and delegates would be a strong impetus for diversity and more sincere representation. With public financing, being low income would not be a barrier to entry and citizens who don't make much money could hold public office and really speak to the needs of low income Marylanders.

Since white women make only 76 cents for every dollar a man makes, and Black and Latina women make even less than that- this would mean that more women would have a path to entry that was previously blocked. It would mean more people of color could represent the distinct needs of their communities. It would lead to the true representation for Maryland that up til now was slated only for the same land-owning, white men that it had been originally designed for.

We encourage a favorable report on SB 415.



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TO: Sen. Pinsky, Chair, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Joanne Juskus, Progressive Maryland Fair Elections Task Force Member, Anne Arundel County (D30)

DATE: February 18th, 2021

POSITION: Support

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I believe that Maryland would benefit from fair elections because it would allow a person to run for office who doesn't have access to the millions of dollars in funds that PAC organizations can provide. Representatives will be able to concentrate on hearing from their constituents, instead of having to answer to the needs of corporate donors and lobbyists. This would increase voter participation, as citizens would feel more fairly represented. I believe this is a very important step toward having a level playing field for all who would like to participate further in the governance of the state of Maryland. Having public matching funds is the right way to establish this.

We encourage a favorable report on SB 415.