



Feb. 2, 2021

Ways and Means Committee

HB 536 - Public Financing Act - State Senate and House of Delegates Candidates and Matching Fund Revisions

Position - Favorable

Dear Chair Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington and Members of the Committee:

We are in strong support of a small-donor funded public financing model for state delegates and senators and the conversion of the current gubernatorial public financing program into a small donor model. Maryland citizens and tax-payers will agree that the investment of \$50 million over a four-year period to empower voters and usher in accountable government will be money well spent.

Our democracy is dying. Powerful corporate interests finance many elected officials and influence legislation at all levels of government. As a result, the citizenry have lost faith and become disengaged from their government; this only serves to exacerbate the problem. You are in position to change this dynamic.

Maryland has been one of the states in the forefront of empowering voters with the 2012 task force and the 2013 enabling legislation that permitted counties to enact a public campaign financing program for the county council and county executive races. The 2018 election cycle in Montgomery County has shown the success of the program. But the success is not simply that some publicly financed candidates were successful in winning their races, but in the profound impact that this mode of campaigning has had on our electorate.

For two years, Our Revolution Prince George's organized with then Councilmember, now Delegate, Mary Lehman to enable a small donor funded program in Prince George's. We helped to organize a briefing before the bill was introduced and find effective advocates at committee hearings. One of the most powerful testimonies at a hearing came from a Montgomery County candidate who was running for an at-large seat on the council. She testified that she had launched her campaign at the Langley Park farmer's market, which is on the border of Montgomery and Prince George's counties. Many customers at that market are poor and buy produce with food stamps. The candidate spoke to these voters and explained the program to them. She described how their eyes lit up when they learned that a five dollar contribution would multiply to twenty five dollars for the candidate. These voters had always seen themselves as recipients, never as donors, and for the first time they envisioned how they could collectively gather five dollar contributions to perhaps elect a member of their own community to office. This electrifying testimony had a profound impact on everyone in the room.

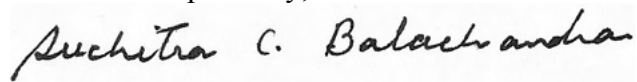
Our Revolution Maryland sees the small donor campaign financing program as a way to awaken our electorate from our collective corporate-induced stupor and empower us with the ability to elect grassroots activists into every seat. The final success of this program will be one where the money needed to run an election for a delegate or senator will not range from \$100,000 to \$150,000 but next

to nothing, because we will have an engaged and informed electorate and there is no cost to casting a vote.

Meanwhile, Maryland taxpayers will agree that the roughly \$50 million cost of this program over a four-year period will be money very well spent, indeed.

We ask for a favorable vote.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suchitra C. Balachandran". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Suchitra Balachandran
ORMD State Organizing Committee