

**Testimony on HB 1066 Local Public Campaign Financing - Expansion to Additional Offices  
Support: Favorable**

**18 February 2021**

**Brandy H. M. Brooks**

**Montgomery County resident**

To the Honorable Chair Kaiser, Vice Chair Washington and members of the Ways & Means Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for HB 1066. My name is Brandy Brooks and I am a resident of Kensington, MD. In 2018, I ran for Montgomery County Council At-Large using Montgomery County's public financing program, the first program in the state. I wanted to share with you my experience as a candidate.

There is no doubt that the power of small donor matching was central to my ability to run for office. As a grassroots organizer, the networks of relationships in my community are everyday working people who don't have a lot of access to wealth. Many want to have a voice in who represents them at all levels of government. For people like me and those in my community to run for office, the fundraising barrier is one of the biggest hurdles - especially in a race that typically costs upwards of \$200,000 to run. Public financing removes that barrier.

The program is transformative in how it welcomes new voices to participate in democracy as a candidate, a donor, or a voter. Public financing opened up a way for me to successfully raise the money I needed to compete in the at-large race in 2018 - and as I launch my campaign for 2022, it is already setting me up for success. Running under the fair elections system combines my values and my commitment to building power with the people in my community. Typically, politicians are faced with a very difficult choice about how to prioritize their time: we all want to be out and connecting with the people we are running to represent, but in a traditional financing system you also have to devote a large chunk of your time to cultivating a small group of wealthy potential donors who can write large checks. With public financing, my fundraising and my community outreach missions are one and the same. Instead of fundraising taking time away from developing relationships with voters and residents, I'm able to use the public financing system to offer people new ways to get involved and make an investment in local politics.

And it really does motivate people to get more involved. I see folks' eyes light up when I talk about how their money is matched - especially when I mention to people who might only have \$5 or \$10 to give that their contribution is still tremendously powerful and important. And honestly, why wouldn't they get

excited - where else in our lives does our money suddenly become 5 times as valuable in supporting the things we care about? When people can think of themselves as political donors with real power to influence our elections, they start to see their engagement in a whole new way. They are more active as volunteers, as canvassers and phonebankers, and as people who want to spread the word about the campaign - because they believe that the investment of their time and treasure really makes a difference.

We've seen renewed energy and pride in our political system through public financing because of the opportunities people have to make a difference. In 2018, nearly 70% of 2018 candidates initially registered to use the public financing system and over 50% certified to receive matching funds. As one of the few women to receive matching funds, my campaign was a success despite losing the election. As a first-time, unknown candidate, I finished 7th out of the field of 33. Fast forward to today and I'm proud to say that I've been able to leverage public financing to launch a strong 2022 campaign - raising over \$33,000 in a week -- all small dollar donors giving an average of \$78.

Why does it matter? It's about the power of people. As a resident, I'm extremely proud to live in a county that has established a public financing system for our local elections. When looking at the concerns on our national politics about the role of money in our elections, we decided to marshal our power as a community and do something to push back against this trend that threatens our democracy. It's about people like Avery, a high school student who is committed to justice and strengthening her community. She recently opened her first bank account and the first thing she did was donate to my campaign. She told me "this is a really important investment for me, my community, and my future." We need to bring more Averys into the process. Her voice matters and she can power fair elections and candidates focused on the issues that matter to our communities, not big donors or special interests.

The fair elections system has expanded across our state and several counties have enacted legislation for county council and executive races. Over the last few years the Montgomery County delegation has repeatedly requested an expansion of the system to other races via local bills. Other counties may prefer to launch their programs with races other than council and executive. Our counties should have the ability to determine the public financing system that works best for their communities. I urge this body to enable fair elections statewide for all county races. HB 1066 does just that. That's democracy at its best.

Brandy H. M. Brooks  
Kensington, MD 20895