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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE  
IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1066  
LOCAL PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING  
EXPANSION TO ADDITIONAL OFFICES  
February 23, 2021**

Get Money Out (GMOM) is an all-volunteer organization that was established just over seven years ago. We now have more than 9,000 citizen supporters. We work in Maryland toward the goals that all citizens should have equal access to the ballot and an equal say in governance.

The United States has endured several decades of the vicious cycle of big-money campaign financing, high-dollar lobbying, and policies that promote economic inequality. The percentage of wealth and income held by the top 1% had skyrocketed *before* the pandemic struck while working families have not shared in the growth of the economy. Now the situation is even more extreme.

The top 0.1% have a collective net wealth of \$16 trillion or 17% of the nation's net assets. We have seen 660 U.S. billionaires add more than \$1 trillion to their wealth in the pandemic.<sup>i</sup> The bottom line is that campaigns are expensive from the point of view of nearly all candidates but dirt cheap from the point of view of multi-national corporations and billionaires.

The essence of democracy is equality of representation and opportunity among citizens. The ever-rising level of economic inequality – combined with our corrupt campaign finance system, voter suppression campaigns, and the attribution of constitutional rights to artificial entities (such as unions and corporations) – threatens to destroy our system of democratic republicanism.

House Bill 1066 builds on the success of the 2013 reform in Maryland's campaign finance system. The General Assembly enabled local governments to create and fund public campaign finance systems for their main legislative and executive offices. Montgomery County has established and operated a highly successful system, which allowed candidates to run and win independently of the developers that formerly exercised disproportionate control. Howard, Prince George's, and Baltimore City are building similar systems based on tiered, small donor matching at a descending rate up

to a maximum contribution that is within reach of a middle-class family. Howard County's system will be effective for its 2022 elections.

Now this bill contemplates expanding these systems to nearly all county-wide offices. Considering the success here and in other states and localities, it is wise that the General Assembly permit counties to expand this proven idea to all local offices if the counties so choose. Public campaign financing can be a major step forward to level the playing field so that talented and civic-minded people of a broader swath of economic backgrounds have a fairer chance to be elected to be Governor. The public finance mechanism helps make small donors – i. e., voters – matter much more. Rather than focusing on wealthy special interests, candidates have a real incentive to target voters and obtain small donations which would then be matched by a multiple from the local public funds. The smallest donations would be multiplied the most.

We enthusiastically ask for a favorable report on House Bill 1066.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://ips-dc.org/u-s-billionaire-wealth-surpasses-1-1-trillion-gain-since-mid-march/>