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Testimony in Support of HB 536:

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

TO: Del. Kaiser, Chair, and members of the Ways and Means Committee
FROM: Jennifer Dwyer, Deputy Executive Director
DATE: January 29th, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 536. 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. HB 536 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, HB 536 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 HB 536.