

March 30, 2021

**Testimony on SB 415
Public Financing Act – Matching Fund Revisions (Maryland Fair Elections Act)
Ways & Means**

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland, the League of Women Voter of Maryland, and Sierra Club Maryland support SB 415, which would modernize the existing public financing system available to gubernatorial candidates available through the Fair Campaign Finance Fund (FCFF), making it similar to small donor matching systems that have been established at the local level throughout the state.

The FCFF is a vital program in Maryland that allows gubernatorial candidates to run for office without relying on moneyed interests to fund their campaigns. Currently, gubernatorial candidates who can show that they have the requisite support from Marylanders are able to qualify for a grant that will allow them to run competitive, but the program is outdated and, unlike programs established at the local level, allows participating candidates to raise private money (ie PAC, business donations).

SB 415 aims to improve the existing program by empowering participating candidates to run races that are powered by small dollars from Marylanders that are matched to ensure they are competitive.

Candidates opting into the public financing program would first have to show sufficient community interest by raising small donations from Marylanders, refraining from taking donations from non-individuals and only donations of \$250 and below. Once they meet qualifying thresholds, at least 1,500 eligible contributions totaling \$120,000 for gubernatorial tickets, they would then be matched by funds from the Fair Campaign Financing Fund, at different rates, depending on the size of the contribution, with no match provided for the last \$100. Gubernatorial candidates would be eligible to receive \$3,000,000 per election, an amount that we believe would ensure candidates are able to run competitive campaigns.

Montgomery County, Howard County, Prince George’s County, and Baltimore City have all established similar programs, with Montgomery County successfully using its program for the first time in 2018. Baltimore County voters overwhelmingly approved a charter amendment in November 2020 that sets the county on path to establishing a program. These programs remain popular amongst Marylanders for a simple reason: particularly since the *Citizens United* decision, they feel that our campaign system is disconnected from the populace, and that LLCs and wealthy individuals render regular Marylanders’ voices meaningless in the current campaign finance environment. The Public Financing Act would give these candidates another choice: focus on constituents through the campaign and keep the focus on constituents throughout your term in office. While these programs cannot fight the escalating cost of elections; only the Supreme Court can reverse that disturbing trend, SB 415 would shift the focus of campaigns away from special interests and back to everyday constituents.

Because SB 415 could significantly raise the voices of regular Marylanders to compete with the big-money spending unleashed by *Citizens United*, we ask the committee for a favorable report.