

March 23, 2022

Testimony on HB 17
Campaign Finance - Recurring Contributions and Donations – Requirements
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland is in support of HB 17 which would ban political campaigns from guiding online donors into recurring donations by default, a practice that has led supporters to make unintended gifts that sometimes total in the thousands of dollars.

The bill will amend Maryland campaign finance law to prohibit the practice of enrolling donors in recurring contributions through “pre-checked” boxes without their consent. Under the bill, recurring contributions will only be allowed after a donor affirmatively consents to it. HB 17 provides an extra layer of protection for donors who might opt-in accidentally by requiring campaigns to inform donors of how to cancel recurring contributions, and to make sure that those contributions are canceled immediately upon the donor’s request.

This legislation comes on the heels of last year’s unanimous bipartisan recommendation from the Federal Election Commission that campaigns be barred from automatically opting donors into recurring contributions through pre-checked boxes in solicitations. The Commission has recognized that many donors are unknowingly enrolled in programs that make recurring withdrawals, and their recommendations are an important step towards strengthening campaign finance law and protecting all campaign contributors, regardless of political party.

Donors should feel empowered to make their voices heard by giving as much or as little to a political campaign as they choose, but this is only possible if the donor can trust that they aren’t being taken advantage of through unethical tactics like pre-checked donation boxes.

For the reasons outlined above, we urge a favorable report on HB 17.