



Maryland Chapter
P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Testimony on: SB 358 – Public Financing Act – State Senate and House of Delegates
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 23, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on SB 358. The bill expands the Public Financing Act and the Fair Campaign Financing Fund to include candidates for State Senator and member of the House of Delegates.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. As a grassroots organization, we believe that the dominant force in campaigns for the General Assembly should not be money, but people and their aspirations for Maryland and their communities. Unfortunately, this goal cannot become reality as long as potential candidates must either self-finance (which many simply cannot do) or rely on large contributors.

Maryland's Public Financing Act worked well for a candidate for Governor in 2014, has recently been improved, and is being used by at least one candidate for Governor this year. Montgomery County started a similar program for county offices in 2018, and Howard County is offering a similar program this year. Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County have created similar programs for future elections.

Experience has demonstrated that offering a voluntary program that matches small campaign contributions does enable people of more diverse backgrounds to become candidates. Expanding the Public Financing Act will help the General Assembly become even more representative of all the wonderful diversity in our state's population.

Seeing candidates relying on large donors can lead to suspicion that they act on behalf of special interests or have hidden agendas, even when that is in fact not the case. By lessening the influence of money in General Assembly elections, this bill will give voters increased confidence that candidates are sincere when they make policy commitments. The result will be increased confidence in government at a time when that confidence is sorely needed.

This bill does not directly constrain the escalating cost of elections, but it will help shift the focus of General Assembly campaigns away from the interests of large donors and back to the needs and desires of everyday constituents.

Voting is the foundation of our democracy, and we believe it is essential to our democracy and to racial and social justice to make the ability to campaign for public office accessible to all regardless of background, personal wealth, or connections with moneyed interests.

We urge a favorable report on SB 358.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.