



TESTIMONY TO THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 949 Campaign Finance – Campaign Finance Reports – Prohibition on Disclosure

POSITION: Oppose

BY: Nancy Soreng President

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The League of Women Voters supports campaign finance regulations that enhance political equality for all citizens, ensure transparency, protect representative democracy from distortion by undisclosed contributions and combat corruption.

This bill would prohibit public inspection of campaign finance reports and would prohibit disclosure of such reports to a person other than the State Board of Elections or a local board of elections, with very limited exceptions. This is contrary to long-established law and practice in Maryland. The proffered rationale for this bill, that this secrecy is necessary to preserve the principle of a secret ballot, is specious. Citizens have a right to know about political contributions. Additionally, one cannot infer a vote based on a political contribution to a given candidate, as citizens are free to (and often do) also contribute to the candidate's opponents.

For more than 50 years, citizens in Maryland have had a broad right of access to public records under the Maryland Public Information Act. Under the spirit and requirements of this exemplary law, the State Board of Elections provides an accessible database so that Marylanders can easily examine campaign finance reports filed by candidates for elective office. The public deserves to know who is contributing to the election of candidates and how much they are donating.

As stated on website of the Maryland Attorney General, "The public's right to information about government activities lies at the heart of a democratic government." This bill would severely limit the public's right to critical information and weaken efforts to preserve representative democracy, opening the door to distortion and corruption by secret contributions.

The League of Women Voters urges an unfavorable report on HB 949.