

# Maryland PIRG

**Rishi Shah, Maryland PIRG Advocate**

**Testimony for HB0344**

**Ways and Means Committee, February 8, 2022**

**Election Law - Campaign Finance - Contributions (Prohibiting Pay to Play Act of 2022)**

**Position: Favorable**

*Maryland PIRG is a state based, non-partisan, citizen funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state and a student funded, student directed chapter at the University of Maryland College Park. For fifty years we've stood up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society.*

We support the Prohibiting Pay to Play Act of 2022 to prohibit lobbyists and business entities from making certain political contributions. Lobbyists cannot contribute to candidates for statewide elected office if the lobbyist is registered to lobby the branch of government that the candidate is running for. One exception is made for General Assembly members who reside in the district in which the lobbyist lives. Additionally, the bill restricts business entities doing state business to contribute to candidates for office in the executive branch.

Elected officials and lobbyists trading favors has historically been a significant issue in Maryland—in recent years, four members of the General Assembly have been convicted of bribery and fraud. Additionally, business entities who have large contracts with the State of Maryland should not be making political contributions to people who have significant influence in the process of deciding who gets those contracts. These sorts of dealings can be disillusioning for members of the public, causing people to lose faith in the integrity of the political process. Banning these contributions can increase public confidence in the system.

Voters should be the ones deciding who represents them in office. Campaign contributions can have a warping effect on elections, determining which candidates have the ability to even finance a run for office, which issues end up on the agenda, and ultimately who wins elections. Banning contributions by out-of-district lobbyists for General Assembly races is a good first step to reduce the influence of political donors influencing elections they aren't even eligible to vote in. Similarly, banning contributions from business entities increases the political power of individual voters—businesses can't vote in elections and consequently shouldn't be making political contributions.

This critical legislation can help restore faith in the political process and reduce the undue influence of money in politics. We request a favorable report.