

February 8, 2022

Testimony on HB 488
Local Public Campaign Financing – Expansion to Additional Offices
Ways and Means

Position: Favorable

The groups above support HB 488, which would expand on the Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013 (CFRA) by allowing public campaign finance systems currently allowed in the counties to also cover offices for sheriff, board of education, judge and clerk of the circuit court, register of wills, judge of the orphans' court, or State's Attorney.

The Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013 included language that allowed counties to create public campaign funding programs that would allow candidates for county council and county executive to run for office with the support of their communities. The Montgomery County Council quickly passed their own program by unanimous vote in 2014, successfully using the program during the 2018 election cycle. Since then, Howard County, Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County have established program and Anne Arundel County will likely have a charter amendment on the ballot this November for voter approval.

During this current 2022 election cycle, will see the first use of Howard County's program. While few are running in the local race, initial indications are incredibly positive as a candidate for county executive and council have already qualified for matching funds. And in Montgomery County where the program is being used for a second time, we again see a diverse mixture of incumbents and first-time candidates have opted into the program and are competitively fundraising by soliciting only small-dollar donations from individual members of their community.

These programs have been gaining popularity in Maryland for a simple reason: particularly since the *Citizens United* decision, Americans across the political spectrum 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. Small dollar public funding programs, on the other hand, lift up regular Marylanders' voices, and empower those with community-supported ideas who may not have connections to deep-pocketed interests.

While CFRA allows counties to address this problem for county council candidates, the problem exists at every level from Governor on down. Common Cause Maryland support amplifying the voices of regular Americans in every election for every office, and so we request a favorable report on HB 488 to allow jurisdiction to continue to expand public funding programs at their discretion.