

Maryland PIRG

Rishi Shah, Maryland PIRG Advocate

Testimony for HB0488

Ways and Means Committee, February 8, 2022

Local Public Campaign Financing – Expansion to Additional Offices

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 HB 488 to authorize local counties to establish public campaign financing programs for additional offices, including State's Attorney, sheriff, register of wills, judge and clerk of the Circuit Court, judge of the Orphans' Court or an elected member of the County Board of Education.

Big money--the large contributions that most people can't afford--drowns out the voice of small donors. In Maryland, your race, your gender, or the amount of money your family makes should not determine the volume of your voice in our elections. But the rise of corporate and large campaign contributions has forced Maryland elected officials and candidates to be increasingly dependent on these donors, giving them less time to hear from and serve their constituents.

Public campaign financing programs allow candidates to run for office with small donations from their constituents and remain competitive with those who accept large and corporate contributions. This serves the dual purpose of reducing corporate and large donor campaign spending and re-engaging the community in the electoral process. This program also aims to expand opportunities to run for office, so candidates of all backgrounds can run based on the strength of their ideas--not access to money. Expanding public campaign financing programs will be better for candidates and elected officials, better for the public, and better for Maryland.

These types of programs are popular, effective, and gaining momentum. Montgomery County, Howard County, Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County have all established public campaign finance systems, and [Montgomery County has successfully run an election using the new system with promising results](#). Now, it is time to expand these programs to include additional offices.

We request a favorable report.