



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Delegate Dana Jones
Before the Ways and Means Committee**

**In Support of HB340
Election Law – Campaign Finance – Enforcement
February 8, 2022, pm**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

For the record - I am Delegate Dana Jones.

I come before you today to introduce a bill that would strengthen our campaign finance laws and gives prosecutors the tools they need to hold those who maliciously break those laws accountable.

The State Board of Elections (SBE) is diligent about protecting those who unknowingly commit campaign finance violations and works closely with violators to help bring their campaign finance accounts into compliance. However, for more complicated violations, SBE works with the state prosecutor's office to do a deeper investigation. This process can take well over a year which often leaves the prosecution with little time to actually bring charges against those malicious actors who have intentionally undermined our campaign finance laws.

This bill would extend the timeframe in which prosecutors can complete investigation and prosecution from 3-years to 4-years. This extra year ensures that the prosecutor's office has enough time to conduct a full investigation and bring the case to trial if needed.

Additionally, in 2013 SBE was granted "civil enforcement authority" for minor technical violations by political committees. However, the law did not grant the civil enforcement authority for minor technical violations for Title 14 (Persons doing Public Business) to SBE. This bill would simply make up for this oversight and clarify this authority. It also makes the application of the law for disclosure violations uniform across the Election Law Article.

Finally, HB340 strengthens penalties against willful violators by forbidding anyone from running for office who has outstanding unpaid campaign finance penalties accrued in the past 5 years. Increasing the maximum civil penalty for each campaign finance violation from \$500 to \$1000 for a campaign finance entity. Finally, criminal penalties from \$1,000 to \$25,000 for criminal penalties related to nondisclosure by business entities. This increase makes the penalties for business entities commensurate with the criminal penalties for political committees in Title 13.

SBE plays such an important role in government oversight and it is important that we give them the proper tools to do so.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on this important legislation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dana Jones" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Delegate Dana Jones