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Environment and Transportation
Committee

House Chair

Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 28, 2023

To: The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

From: Delegate Jen Terrasa
District 13, Howard County

Re: Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB979, Municipal Elections –
Candidates – Reports of Donations and Disbursements

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy and the Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present HB979, which brings transparency to campaign financing on the local level by requiring candidates running for office in all municipalities in the state of Maryland to report who contributed to their campaigns and how much.

Information as to where campaign money comes from and how it is spent by the candidate aids voters in evaluating those who seek office. Knowing the source of a candidate's financial support alerts voters to the interests to which a candidate is most likely to be responsive and thus facilitate predictions of future performance in office. The goal of HB979 is simple transparency.

The original idea for this bill was to require candidates running for the board of mega-homeowners associations and other large common ownership communities to file campaign finance disclosure. But in the process of developing that legislation, I discovered that there is no state requirement for candidates for municipal elections to report who gave them money and what they spent it on.

So, I introduced a bill last session, HB93, which covered both large COCs and municipalities, but it was recommended that these should be separated. This year, legislation dealing with HOAs was turned into a local Howard County bill only covering Columbia Association and municipalities was separated out into this statewide bill.

Currently, there is no Maryland law requiring reporting of campaign financing in municipalities. Some municipalities have their own requirements, and under Maryland law, if they do, candidates must forward copies of whatever they file with the

municipality to the state so that all reports can be found in one place. However, only 35 out of 157 municipalities in Maryland require candidates to file campaign finance reports in a municipal election. (Aberdeen, Annapolis, Baltimore, Berlin, Bladensburg, Boonsboro, Bowie, Brunswick, Chestertown, College Park, Cumberland, Easton, Elkton, Emmitsburg, Frederick, Gaithersburg, Greenbelt, Hagerstown, Havre de Grace, Hyattsville, Laurel, Laytonsville, Mount Rainier, New Carrollton, North Beach, North East, Ocean City, Rockville, Salisbury, Seat Pleasant, Smithsburg, Snow Hill, Takoma Park, Taneytown, and Westminster). This bill would provide this transparency to voters in the other 122 municipalities and would require all candidates on the local level to report donations and expenditures just like anyone else running for office in the state.

HB979 requires municipalities to require candidates for municipal office (like mayor or city council) to file reports of donations and disbursements. And requires those reports to be sent to the state board of elections by the municipality within 5 days. The state board must make these reports publicly available on their website. Note, current law already provides that if a municipality voluntarily has a requirement of campaign finance reporting, the report must be sent to the state and the state must post it.

The bill was amended to allow a municipality to exempt a candidate from filing disclosure reports if they file an affidavit stating that they will not spend or raise more than \$1,000.

HB979 makes sure that candidates in municipalities report who is financially contributing to them and what they are spending their money on – just like we do as elected officials in the General Assembly. In the end, it's all about transparency.

I respectfully urge a favorable report.