

March 28, 2023

Testimony on HB 979
Municipal Elections - Candidates - Reports of Donations and Disbursements
Energy, Education, & the Environment

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports HB 979, which would strengthen campaign finance reporting requirements for municipal candidates.

While there are a number of municipalities that require reporting for candidates, HB 979 expands campaign finance law to cover those that do not currently have processes in place. The proposed legislation simply ensures that candidates in these municipalities are required to file their reports with the State Board of Elections.

This change is important for public access to campaign data. In almost every election year, Common Cause handles a surprising number of questions from the public about access to municipal campaign reports. This confusion has grown as certain municipal reports are being posted by the State Board while leaving those in other municipalities in search of information. This is an issue during municipal elections, when the public wants to easily find out who is donating to campaigns. It is also an issue as when local officials run for higher office and the record of their previous fundraising efforts is not available in the same location as their state level campaign reports.

One thing we would suggest the committee consider is a further requirement that SBE post in a publicly accessible place an updated calendar of when municipal elections are taking place, as well as election results once they become available.

Overall, this legislation would be a small but important change for transparency in campaign finance laws. For these reasons, we request a favorable report on HB 979.