



Maryland Municipal League

The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 28, 2023

Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Bill: HB 979 - Municipal Elections – Candidates – Reports of Donations and Disbursements

Position: Oppose

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League opposes HB 979, which would require all candidates for municipal office to file donations and disbursements reports.

Among our members, there appears to be a natural evolution toward campaign finance systems as municipalities grow in complexity and size. All 20 of our most populated members have already adopted a local campaign finance ordinance. The League is aware of an additional 15 cities and towns with campaign finance laws in place but suspects there are more as we have not undertaken a thorough review of all 157 town codes for this purpose.

Additionally, many more jurisdictions are required by ethics law to have elected officials and certain employees file financial disclosures. In the ordinances the League has reviewed thus far, they also include candidates for elected office. According to the Maryland State Ethics Commission, these forms *“require the filer to identify real estate interests, equity interests, and other relationships such as employment, debts and gifts so that the public can be assured that the impartiality and independent judgment of those officials and employees will be maintained.”*

The carefully crafted ethic law that requires these reports also takes into consideration the complexity of municipalities. The Commission is authorized to exempt a municipality if they find that *“because of the nature of the board or size of the municipal corporation, the application of this title to the board, member, or municipal corporation (1) would be an unreasonable invasion of privacy; (2) would reduce significantly the availability of qualified individuals for public service; and (3) is not necessary to preserve the purpose of this title.”*

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In particular, the League is concerned that forcing all municipalities to create and administer a campaign finance system would be an administrative burden on small towns – often run by part-time, and in some cases volunteer clerks – and could further deter qualified candidates from running for public office. Many small towns already have a hard enough time recruiting officials to fill their councils, boards, or commissions in today’s political climate.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that there appears to be a natural evolution toward adopting more stringent campaign finance reporting systems as they become necessary. Therefore, the League respectfully requests that this committee provide HB 979 with an unfavorable report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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