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Ways and Means Committee

Secretary, Women's Caucus

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Delegate Dana Jones
Before the Ways and Means Committee
In Support of HB 441

Election Law - Campaign Finance - Draft Committees and Exploratory Committees
February 14th, 2023

Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee, for the record, I am Delegate Dana Jones.

Exploratory and draft committees are currently exempt from the same regulations that keep our campaign finance committees transparent and auditable. This exception to the rules is dangerous, and prevents the general public and interested parties from being able to properly review and monitor these committees. Exploratory and draft committees help determine whether or not elected officials have the viability to run for office, but if the individual decides not to run for the office of which they explored, the financial details of the committee do not need to be disclosed.

An exploratory committee is defined as “an entity established by a prospective candidate for a public office to determine the potential candidate’s viability for that public office.” Similarly, a draft committee is “an entity that is organized to encourage a potential candidate to run for office but is not authorized by the potential candidate”. Current Maryland law fails to provide oversight and transparency for exploratory and draft committees. HB 441 would ensure transparency by requiring that these election committees comply with campaign finance disclosure laws; limit the purpose for which funds can be expended; and establish specific processes for dissolving these committees.

A substantive amendment I have includes provisions for reporting procedures; removing contribution limits; expanding the list of permitted expenditures; clarifying that candidate committees can purchase supplies at fair market value; adding a list for the use of leftover funds; and a 120 day deadline for the reporting of such records after candidacy is filed.

I urge a favorable report as amended on HB 441.

