

January 31, 2023

Testimony on HB 176
Local Public Campaign Finance - Expansion to Additional Offices
Ways & Means

Position: Favorable

The groups above support HB 176, which would expand on the Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013 (CFRA) by allowing public campaign finance systems currently allowed in the counties to also cover offices for sheriff, board of education, judge and clerk of the circuit court, register of wills, judge of the orphans' court, or State's Attorney.

The Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2013 included language that allowed counties to create public campaign funding programs that would allow candidates for county council and county executive to run for office with the support of their communities. The Montgomery County Council quickly passed their own program by unanimous vote in 2014, successfully using the program during the 2018 election cycle. Since then, Howard County, Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County have established programs of their own.

During the 2022 election cycle, we saw the first use of Howard County's program. And in Montgomery County where the program was used for a second time, we saw a diverse mixture of twenty incumbents and first-time candidates qualify for and opt into the program, with three of those candidates being successful in their bids for office.

These programs have been gaining popularity in Maryland for a simple reason: particularly since the *Citizens United* decision, Americans across the political spectrum feel that our campaign system is disconnected from the populace, and that LLCs and wealthy individuals render regular Marylanders' voices meaningless in the current campaign finance environment. Small dollar public funding programs, on the other hand, lift up regular Marylanders' voices, and empower those with community-supported ideas who may not have connections to deep-pocketed interests.

While CFRA allows counties to address this problem for county council candidates, the problem exists at every level from Governor on down. Common Cause Maryland supports amplifying the voices of regular Americans in every election for every office. For these reasons, we request a favorable report on HB 176 to permit jurisdictions to continue the expansion of public funding programs at their discretion.