



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 494 Campaign Finance – Political Organizations – Prohibitions and Disclosures

POSITION – Support

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The League of Women Voters has a long-standing position in support of “improved methods of financing political campaigns in order to ensure the public’s right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and promote citizen participation in the political process.”

We therefore support HB 494, which would help ensure full coverage of Maryland’s campaign finance disclosure requirements. While we understand the requirements of the Supreme Court decision in favor of Citizens United in 2010 regarding independent expenditures on behalf of political campaigns, we note in particular the majority opinion’s comments about the benefits of disclosure of the sources of those funds: “Identification of the source of advertising may be required as a means of disclosure, so that the people will be able to evaluate the arguments to which they are being subjected”

And further: “The First Amendment protects political speech; and disclosure permits citizens and shareholders to react to the speech of corporate entities in a proper way. This transparency enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages.”

We have ample evidence from recent news about the risks of loopholes in campaign finance legislation being exploited by so-called “dark money”. For these reasons, the League of Women Voters fully agrees that Maryland legislation should cover all aspects and participants in political campaigns, and the State Board of Elections and the Maryland Comptroller should be empowered to fully investigate any violations.

We urge a favorable report on HB 494.