

DANA JONES
Legislative District 30A
Anne Arundel County

Appropriations Committee

Subcommittees

Vice Chair, Health and Social Services

Oversight Committee on Pensions

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Vice Chair, Anne Arundel
County Delegation



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 161
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3211 · 301-858-3211
800-492-7122 Ext. 3211
Dana.Jones@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Delegate Dana Jones
Before the Ways and Means Committee

In Support of HB 792
Election Law - Campaign Finance - Draft Committees and Exploratory Committees
February 20th, 2024, 1 PM

For the record - I am Delegate Dana Jones.

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways and Means Committee, I come before you today to re-introduce HB 792, Election Law - Campaign Finance - Draft Committees and Exploratory Committees, which was heard in this Committee last year. The cross-file of this year's bill has passed the Senate unanimously.

For too long, Exploratory and Draft campaign committees have been exempt from our accountability and disclosure laws. HB 792 would close this loophole. Marylanders deserve to know who is financing prospective candidates for elected office.

An Exploratory Committee is "an entity established by a prospective candidate for a public office to determine the potential candidate's viability." A Draft Committee is organized to encourage a potential candidate to run for office without approval by, or coordination with, that individual.

Current law fails to provide oversight for these entities. In 2022, the State Board of Elections (SBE) crafted regulations based on the Attorney General's opinion regarding the formation of Exploratory Committees. These didn't require compliance with basic campaign finance transparency laws. HB 792 requires that both types of committees report contributions to the SBE, bringing them into line with the rules others must already follow.

This bill does not eliminate these committees nor impose limits on donations. The bill would

ensure that they would follow disclosure laws; limit the purpose for which funds can be expended; and establish processes for dissolving them. These guardrails do not currently exist.

Exploratory and Draft Committees would be allowed to engage in the following types of expenditures:

- Public opinion polls;
- Direct mail;
- Hiring staff;
- Website hosting;
- Digital communications;
- Leasing (but not purchasing) office space; and
- Purchasing electronic equipment.

As outlined by the Attorney General in his favorable testimony, there is a distinct lack of explicit rules that Exploratory and Draft Committees may operate under. HB 792 will remedy this issue.

I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 792.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dana Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Delegate Dana Jones