

February 26, 2025

Testimony on SB 575
Election Law - Local Public Campaign Financing - Board of Education Ho. Co. 3-25
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports SB 575, which would provide Howard County Council the option to expand their public campaign finance program, the Citizens' Election Fund, to cover their board of education.

The Campaign Finance Reform Act (CFRA) of 2013 included language that provided county governments the authority to establish local public campaign financing programs for county council and county executive. Six counties and Baltimore City have since established programs. In 2016, a majority of Howard County voters voted in favor of creating a local program, now called the Citizens' Election Fund. Common Cause Maryland worked in coalition with partners to assist with the implementation of this program and continues to support the local government and Committee as they prepare for the 2026 election cycle.

In 2023, our partners at Maryland PIRG released a [report](#) analyzing data from the 2022 election cycle, specifically the first use of Howard County's Citizens' Election Fund. They found that small donors provided 97% of the funding for qualified candidates in Howard County, while only providing 8% of the funding to candidates who did not participate in the program. Also, that candidates who qualified for the program received an average contribution of \$139 compared to non-participating candidates who received an average donation of \$778. Qualifying candidates received on average 94% more contributions from individuals and nearly tripled their average contributions using matching funds. This demonstrates that as candidates gain experience using the programs and counties get through the hurdles of properly implementing these programs – they work as intended.

Public campaign financing continues to gain 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 and executive candidates, the problem exists at every level of government. Common Cause Maryland supports lifting the voices of regular Americans in every election for every office, and so we request a favorable report on SB 575