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Health Committee

Subcommittees

Elder and Long-Term Care

Maternal, Infant, and Child Health

Public Health and
Minority Health Disparities



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Judiciary Committee

Chair Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett

Vice Delegate Debra Davis

101 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present House Bill 962, Local Public Campaign Financing – County Boards of Education.

Over the past few years, we have all watched school board races change. They've become more high-profile, more expensive, and in many places, more polarized. And yet, the people who step up to run are often parents, teachers, PTA leaders, and community advocates. They are not career politicians with deep fundraising networks. They are people who care about their kids and their schools.

But the reality is that running a competitive campaign costs money. And when the price of entry gets too high, it discourages everyday community members from running and increases reliance on large private donations.

This bill is simple. It builds on Maryland's existing local public campaign financing framework and allows counties, if they choose, to establish voluntary public financing systems for elected members of county boards of education. Counties already have this option for executive and legislative offices. This legislation just extends that same local flexibility to school board races.

I have seen firsthand how public financing can work. I've worked on local campaigns that used Montgomery County's public financing system, and we saw it open doors. It allowed candidates to spend more time talking to voters instead of dialing for dollars. It encouraged small-dollar participation. And it made campaigns more accessible to people who otherwise might not have

considered running. It is not perfect, but it has strengthened local democracy in meaningful ways.

This is strictly an enabling bill. No county is required to create a program. If a county believes this model makes sense for its community, it may establish one by local law. Counties would define eligibility criteria, fund and administer the program, and handle auditing and oversight at the local level. Participation remains entirely voluntary for candidates.

The bill also keeps strong guardrails in place. Public funds can only be used for the specific office for which they are granted. Candidates who opt in must establish a separate campaign finance entity, may not transfer funds between accounts, and must follow all state election laws. The county's chief financial officer administers the fund, and the State Board of Elections retains oversight authority.

Counties may also adopt stricter requirements for participating candidates and establish penalties for violations. So there is both flexibility and accountability built into the framework.

At its core, this bill is about fairness. It is about making sure that decisions about our children's education are not shaped by who can raise the most money, but by who can best serve their community. It is about lowering barriers to entry and strengthening public trust in our local institutions.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report on House Bill 962.

Thank you for your time and consideration.