

FAVORABLE TESTIMONY

HOUSE BILL 101

Public Broadcasters – Debate for Candidates for Statewide Office – Required Participants**

Submitted by:

Shane Robinson

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Private Citizen, Maryland

Green Party Member

Position: Favorable

Members of the Committee:

I submit this testimony in strong support of House Bill 101.

I served in the Maryland House of Delegates from January 2011 through January 2019, representing District 39. During that time, I was directly involved in legislative deliberations concerning public institutions, appropriations, and the standards applied to entities that receive State funding. I now speak as a private citizen, but with a continued respect for the responsibilities that accompany public trust.

House Bill 101 addresses a recurring weakness in Maryland's electoral process: the exclusion of certified candidates from publicly funded debate forums. When a public broadcaster hosts a debate for a statewide office, it is not operating solely as a private media outlet. It is exercising a public function using public resources.

Voters are best served when they can hear directly from all candidates who will appear on the general election ballot. This includes candidates from major parties, minor parties, and independent candidates who have met Maryland's legal requirements for ballot access. Conditioning debate participation on party affiliation, fundraising totals, or polling thresholds elevates political viability metrics above voter information. While such metrics may be useful to campaigns or media analysis, they should not determine access to publicly funded forums.

This bill does not compel public broadcasters to hold debates, nor does it dictate editorial coverage. It simply establishes a clear and reasonable condition: if a public broadcaster hosts a debate for a statewide office, it must invite all candidates certified to the general election ballot and provide an equitable opportunity to participate. That standard reflects fairness rather than favoritism.

House Bill 101 also strengthens public confidence in both elections and public media. Inclusive debates signal neutrality, transparency, and respect for voters' right to hear all legitimate choices. Excluding legally qualified candidates, particularly those from minor parties or running

independently, risks reinforcing voter cynicism and the perception that public institutions favor only established political actors.

As a former legislator, I also recognize that the enforcement mechanism included in this bill is appropriate and proportional. Conditioning the use of State funds on compliance with statutory requirements is a familiar and well-established principle in Maryland law. Public funding reasonably carries public obligations.

This legislation is not about advancing any single party or ideology. It is about ensuring that Maryland's publicly funded institutions serve voters first by facilitating open and democratic discourse. Regardless of political affiliation, Marylanders benefit from a more inclusive and transparent electoral process.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a **Favorable Report** on House Bill 101.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shane Robinson

Former Delegate, District 39

Maryland