

## **Testimony in Support of HB101-Public Broadcasters-Debate for Candidates for Statewide Office-Required Participants**

### **To The Government, Labor, and Election Appropriations**

#### **Greetings**

My name is Robert Alex Stubblefield and I am a poet, lay minister, activist-organizer with several organizations including the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition, Black United Front Of Moco, Montgomery Chapter of DSA among others and I write this in full support of HB101-Public Broadcasters-Debate for Candidates for Statewide Office-Required Participants. My reasons are explained before.

The first reason why I'm supporting this bill is because it's vital. It's vital for a democracy to flourish and in order for democracy to flourish, other candidates must be heard who actually have something to offer to Marylanders. As things stand right now that isn't happening. It isn't happening because you have a body, in this case Maryland Public Television, Key word is Public, as well as other state-funded broadcasters have constantly and routinely excluded qualified third party and independent candidates from televised public debates and forums. How they do this and this has been documented that MPT and other use tactics such as fundraising thresholds, which they know many third parties and independent candidates have difficulty raising especially when a party or candidate is grassroots based. Another tactic they use is arbitrary polling in which they select a few people to vote on who can appear but it doesn't get sent out to every Marylander for a more accurate poll. This is wrong because it totally violates the spirit of democracy in which voters in Maryland who are independents don't have a say but it has created a system of gatekeeping that creates a false choice. On top of that, these entities are publicly funded by our tax dollars and if they are going to receive our tax dollars to fund their programs, there must be a form of accountability.

This is what this bill is about: It creates a form of accountability for publicly funded communications as a requirement for public funds that if they're going to host a debate during the general elections, they must invite all candidates who are qualified on the ballot to appear. If any broadcaster violates that, they will lose state funding for the remaining of the fiscal year. This accountability is necessary because if Maryland taxpayers are funding public broadcasting, then it must serve all Maryland voters, not those who support what is essentially a one-party state. On top of this, it will actually help propel democracy in this place by actually giving Marylander something to vote for instead of vote against. It will also provide equitable time and

opportunity to each candidate. It also provides exceptions for write-in candidates and candidates who suspended their campaigns.

Bottom line, this bill is necessary and a must and I highly encourage the passage of this.

Thank you