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**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
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**Testimony in Support of HB 157**  
**Election Law - Campaign Finance - Exploratory Committees**

For too long, exploratory campaign committees have been exempt from our election accountability and disclosure laws. Marylanders deserve to know who is financing prospective candidates for elected office. HB 157 would close this loophole.

The Senate unanimously passed a substantively similar bill in 2025.

An exploratory committee is an entity established by a prospective candidate for a public office to determine the potential candidate's viability. For instance, a person might want to test the waters of a potential run for office before officially becoming a candidate. Exploratory committees are more typical for higher offices, including statewide offices such as Governor.<sup>1</sup>

In 2022, the State Board of Elections finalized [regulations](#) on exploratory committees, based on existing State Board policies and advice from the Office of the Attorney General. Because no state law currently regulates exploratory committees, the regulations did not require compliance with basic campaign finance transparency laws, including the reporting of contributions and expenditures.

HB 157 closes this loophole in state law by requiring that exploratory committees report donations and expenses to the State Board of Elections, bringing them in line with the rules other campaign committees already follow.

This bill does not eliminate exploratory committees nor would it impose limits on contributions. The bill would simply ensure that exploratory committees follow the same disclosure laws as other political committees.

Notably, exploratory committees for federal offices are already required to disclose contributors and expenditures.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples in Maryland include Laura Neuman (2022), Tim Adams (2021), Michael Steele (2021), Jim Shea (2017), and Larry Hogan (2010).

Under this bill, exploratory committees would be limited on the types of activities they can spend money on. The purpose of these restrictions is to ensure that the funds are spent on activities that help the potential candidate determine the viability of their candidacy.

Maryland's current regulations keep the exploratory period and official candidacy independent of one another. With this in mind, HB 157 also codifies a process for dissolution of an exploratory committee. Once an individual becomes a candidate, up to \$6,000 of their exploratory funds can be transferred to their political committee. Any remaining money must be appropriately returned, disbursed, or donated.

Collectively, these policies will ensure that prospective candidates can test their viability before pursuing a formal campaign, while also ensuring that prospective candidates can't dodge campaign finance laws.