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**Testimony in Support of HB 1378 – Corporations and Associations -
Limitations on Election and Ballot Issue Activities (Maryland Corporate
Power Reset Act)**

To the Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

March 4, 2026

Chair Wells and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 1378, which responds forcefully to one of the root causes of the crisis of politics in the United States today. For several years, I was a full-time volunteer activist on this very issue of big money in politics. I testified dozens of times that the *Citizens United* decision would enable a tsunami of money from corporations and billionaires to overwhelm the electoral process.

The *Citizens United* era continues to be characterized by ever-escalating corruption in the U.S. political system. It's a major reason why disgust with our politicians keeps rising. Politicians feel trapped because they want to keep up with opponents' fundraising. Thus, both political parties mostly concede to the interests of campaign donors and spenders while paying lip service to the interests of voters. In April of 2014, we testified before the Maryland General Assembly, saying:

It will get worse before it gets better because of the Court and because radical inequality and domination of Big Money in Politics form a vicious cycle. . . . Dark money from corporate coffers could totally swamp traditional campaign fundraising. . . [T]he race for dollars will overwhelm and consume the time and energy that is needed for doing the people's business. Alas, that prediction has come true.

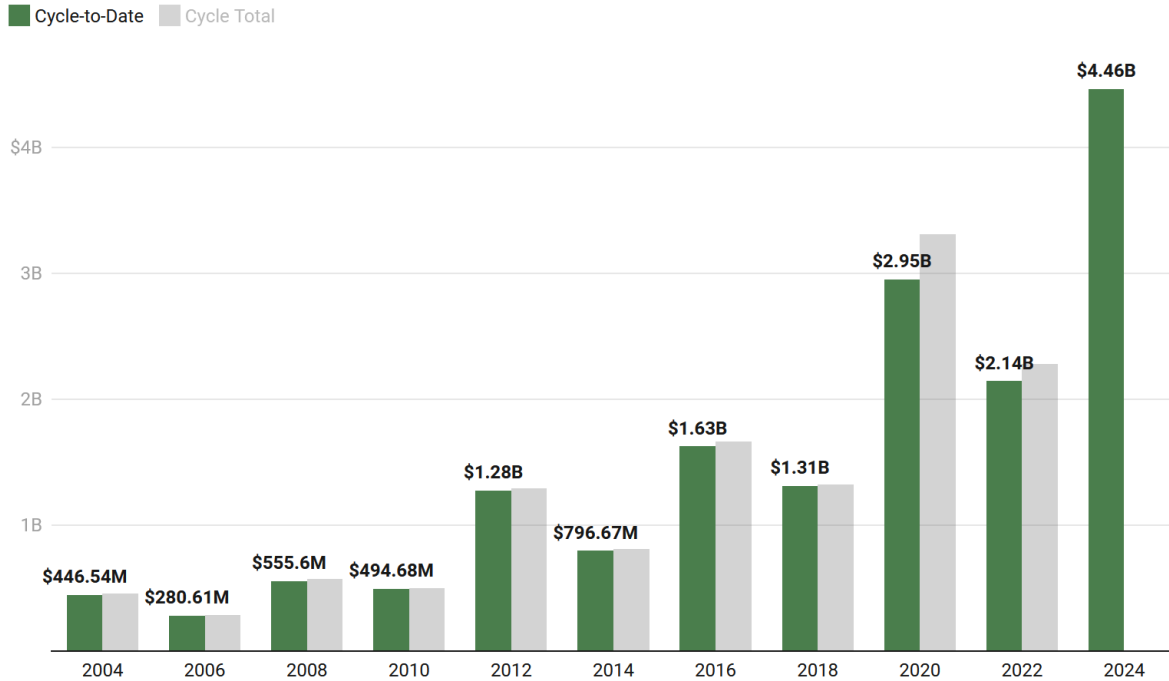
The 2024 federal elections set several ugly records:

- Most "outside" money
- Most billionaire money
- Most money directly from corporations

“The 2024 election cycle has [broken the record](#) for outside spending, with about \$4.5 billion in spending reported by independent groups such as super PACs prior to Election Day. The bulk of that has come in the form of independent expenditures, money spent to buy things like ads and mailers that explicitly advocate for a candidate's election or defeat.” ([The Brennan Center](#))

Outside spending on 2024 elections shatters records

Outside spending on 2024 federal elections has hit a record \$4.5 billion, with more than half of that spending coming from groups that do not fully disclose the source of their funding.



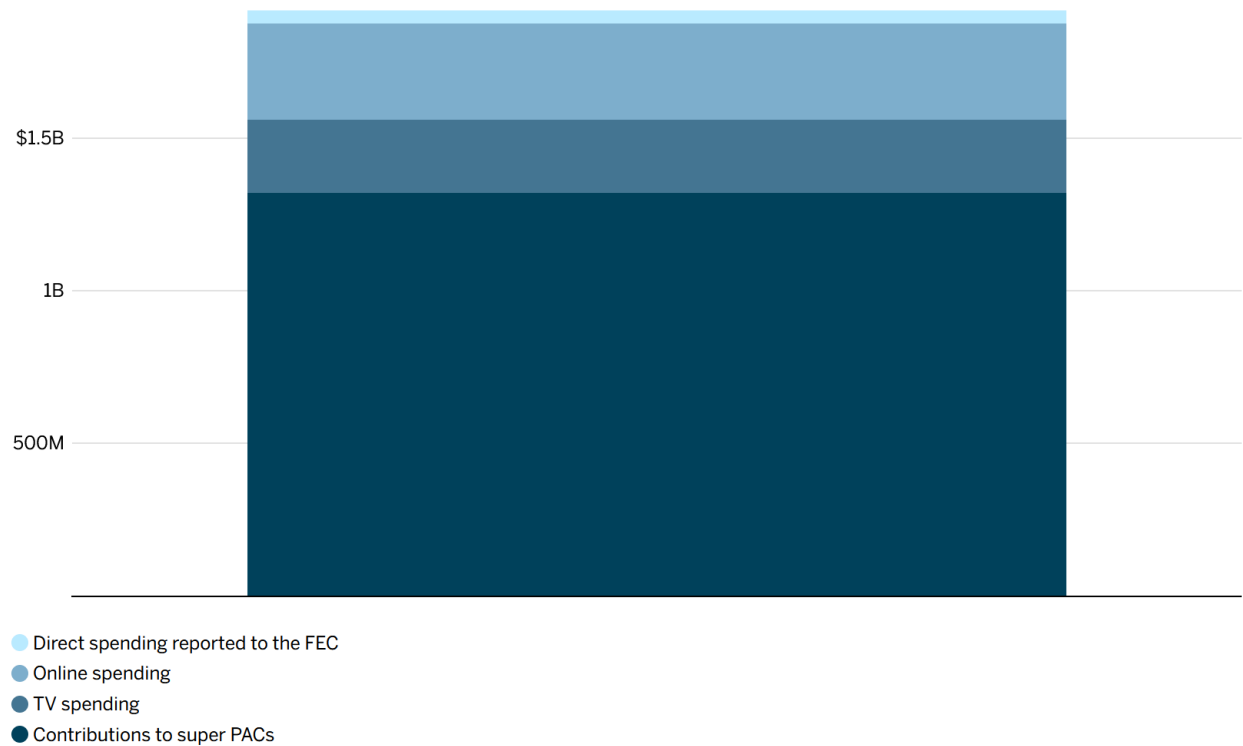
OpenSecrets analysis of federal campaign finance reports through Nov. 5, 2024, compared to outside spending reported through the same date in prior two-year election cycles. Cycle-to-date totals include spending on independent expenditures, electioneering communications, and communication costs.

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Inflation rose about 50% from 2008 (the last presidential election cycle before *Citizens United*) to 2024. Yet outside spending, as shown in the chart above, rose by a factor of 9 to \$4.46 billion – almost a quarter of all money spent in the election. Candidates for office are losing control of the fund-raising process to big money sources.

Another malign feature of the current campaign funding terrain is “dark money.” In the 2024 cycle, \$1.9 billion was spent or transferred through channels that are not required by federal law to disclose sources. These funds usually pass through federally chartered 501(c)(4) corporations. The graph below shows that a huge chunk of this money is passed directly to SuperPACs.

Dark Money by Type of Spending in 2024



Note: Data-reporting limitations make it possible that as much as \$28.4 million of the direct spending reported to the FEC could also be included in the TV or online ad categories. This chart includes all the observed spending in each of the categories; however, the \$1.9 billion total avoids double counting such spending.

Source: Brennan Center analysis of data from the FEC, OpenSecrets, and online platforms; Wesleyan Media Project analysis of Vivvix CMAG data.

The good news here is that HB 1378 can stop 501(c)(4) dark money from operating in our state. That alone would justify its enactment.

The main function of big money in politics has been to make policy changes in the areas of taxes, financial deregulation, social program changes, and increases in corporate welfare that further exacerbate economic inequality. During the 2024 election campaign, candidate Trump explicitly asked fossil fuel executives to spend a billion dollars to help elect him. As President, he has then caused the EPA to revoke the finding that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases endanger human health. The cryptocurrency industry spent about \$250 million in the recent election seeking and now obtaining favorable regulatory treatment of its “products.” There are a host of additional mechanisms such as regulatory capture and the Congress-to-K-Street revolving door that keep the vicious cycle going whereby the rich get richer and working families get poorer because of big money in politics. **Thus, HB 1378 is the other side of the affordability coin – it attacks the reason why the vast majority of the U.S. public are feeling squeezed economically.**

In 2010, many people felt that *Citizens United* was the Supreme Court’s worst decision since *Dred Scott*. The dire predictions have come true. HB 1378 can be an important corrective towards restoring free and fair elections, and I urge a favorable report.