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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Support of HB 584
Clean Maryland Democracy Amendment

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart
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What the Bill Does

HB 584 proposes a constitutional amendment to strengthen the core promise of our democracy: that every eligible voter counts, every vote is protected, and our elections belong to the people of Maryland — not foreign interests, hidden money, or the highest bidder. This amendment places key democratic safeguards directly into the Maryland Constitution and gives voters themselves the final say at the ballot box.

Why It Matters

HB 584 advances three foundational democracy protections.

First, it strengthens and safeguards the right to vote. The amendment prohibits State and local governments from denying or weakening the right to vote based on race, color, language, disability, or other protected characteristics. It also directs the General Assembly to enact a Maryland Voting Rights Act by 2028, ensuring modern, durable protections against discrimination in voting and election administration. As our state grows more diverse, our laws must ensure that access to the ballot grows stronger — not weaker.

Second, it keeps foreign and secret money out of Maryland elections. The bill bans foreign governments, foreign nationals, and foreign-influenced corporations from directly or indirectly spending money to influence Maryland elections. Our elections should reflect the will of Maryland voters — not overseas entities or opaque funding structures designed to mask influence. Transparency

and accountability are essential to public confidence, and this amendment draws a clear constitutional line against outside interference.

Third, it creates a Fair Elections option for candidates for the General Assembly. This voluntary public financing system would allow candidates to run competitive campaigns based on small-dollar donations and public matching funds instead of relying primarily on large private contributions. That opens the door for more Marylanders — teachers, public servants, small business owners, community advocates — to run for office without needing access to wealthy donor networks. It increases competition, broadens representation, and reduces the perceived and real influence of big money in politics.

Taken together, these reforms are about restoring and strengthening public trust. Too many Marylanders believe — often with good reason — that politics is dominated by money and special interests far removed from their daily lives. When voters lose faith in the fairness of elections or the accessibility of public office, participation drops and cynicism grows. This amendment responds directly to that concern by protecting voting rights, limiting improper financial influence, and widening the path to public service.

Letting the Voters Decide

Because HB 584 is a constitutional amendment, it does not impose these reforms unilaterally. Instead, it places the question before the people of Maryland. Voters will have the opportunity to decide whether these democracy protections should be enshrined in our Constitution. That is exactly where decisions of this magnitude belong.

The amendment sets durable guardrails while allowing future legislatures to fill in policy details through statute and implementation. It establishes principles first — voter protection, election integrity, and fair access to candidacy — and trusts both lawmakers and voters to carry them forward responsibly.

Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably

At its heart, HB 584 is about putting voters first. It protects the right to vote, shields Maryland elections from foreign and hidden money, and gives everyday people a fair opportunity to run for office. It reinforces the principle that democracy should be responsive to the many — not just the wealthy and well-connected.

This amendment strengthens the foundation of our democratic system while preserving the voters' ultimate authority to approve it. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 584.