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February 4, 2026

TO: The Honorable Melissa Wells
Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee

FROM: Tiffany Clark
Director, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

RE: House Bill 157 - Election Law - Campaign Finance - Exploratory
Committees (Support)

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) supports House Bill 157 - Election Law - Campaign Finance - Exploratory Committees, which proposes to establish clear standards for exploratory committee expenditures and fund transfers in Maryland's campaign finance system.

As Maryland's elected Chief Legal Officer, the Attorney General supervises and directs the legal business of the State. The OAG advises and represents State institutions, agencies, boards, commissions, and officials, while representing Maryland's interests in state and federal litigation. The OAG uses its authority to enforce the rule of law, protect Marylanders, and promote the public good.

While current regulations define exploratory committees as entities established to determine a prospective candidate's viability for public office, they do not provide comprehensive oversight or explicit compliance requirements under State campaign finance transparency laws. This gap creates uncertainty about permissible uses of exploratory committee funds and potential opportunities to circumvent campaign finance safeguards.

House Bill 157 addresses this concern by establishing clear guardrails for exploratory committee operations. The bill explicitly defines authorized expenditures, prohibits exploratory committees from making advance purchases of goods or services for a potential candidate's political committee, and requires that any equipment transfers occur at fair market value. Additionally, the bill mandates that remaining funds be returned proportionally to contributors or transferred to

qualifying organizations within 120 days after a potential candidate files a certificate of candidacy or after the filing deadline passes.

We appreciate the General Assembly's work on this important policy and welcome the opportunity to share our perspective. For the foregoing reasons, the Office of the Attorney General respectfully urges the Committee to give **House Bill 157** a favorable report.

Cc: Members of the Committee