

Maryland PIRG

**HB136: Maryland Public Ethics Law - Officials of the Legislative Branch - Gifts of Food and Beverages
Government, Labor and Elections
February 17th, 2026
Emily Scarr, Maryland PIRG
Favorable**

Maryland PIRG is a state based, small donor funded public interest advocacy organization with grassroots members across the state. We work to find common ground around common sense solutions that will help ensure a healthier, safer, more secure future.

Maryland PIRG recommends a favorable report on HB136 to update Maryland campaign finance law to prohibit legislators from accepting meals from lobbyists, interest groups, and corporations during the legislative session.

Committee dinners increase access and influence to legislators for well-money interests during session, while limiting access to the public, increasing the risk of corruption and the perception of corruption in the public's eye. We have seen a steady increase in these dinners in the last 5 years. Not only do the dinners give corporations and well-funded special interests special access to legislators, they also take up valuable time during the legislative session, giving legislators less time to hear from and serve their constituents.

Under changes proposed, legislators can ONLY accept meals during legislative session if the entire legislative body is invited as well as the public. This, more limited carve out to the ban on meals, enables public receptions in lieu of private dinners.

Well healed utility companies are, perhaps, the poster child for the use of Committee Dinners. [Maryland PIRG Foundation](#) research found that utilities spent \$33,673 on Committee Dinners and other events during the 2024 lobbying season, and an additional \$32,045 on a reception for the entire General Assembly. [And according to the Washington Post](#) 2025 analysis , "During the Maryland General Assembly's 90-day legislative session this year, energy companies like Baltimore Gas and Electric, Constellation, Washington Gas and PEPCO combined to spend more than \$49,000 wining-and-dining the very lawmakers who were publicly promising to intervene with rising electricity bills in the state.

In a democracy every citizen should have more or less equal opportunity to influence the actions of the government. A government of, by, and for the people requires political equality; that is, no demographic barriers such as wealth, race, geography, gender, etc. should make any one citizen more powerful than another. A system with more political equality will ensure that lawmakers prioritize what is best for the most people over what is best for a few well-heeled special interests.

Allowing those with wealth, including corporations and special interests, special access to our elected officials during the legislative process undermines these democratic principles and weakens the voice of average people.

We respectfully request a favorable report.

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