



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013 Voice/Relay

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive
cball@howardcountymd.gov

www.howardcountymd.gov
FAX 410-313-3051

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The Honorable Melissa Wells, Chair
Government, Labor, and Elections Committee
145 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of House Bill 962:** Local Public Campaign Financing - County Boards of Education

Dear Chair Wells, Vice Chair Kerr, and Members of the Committee:

House Bill 962 represents a significant step forward in strengthening democratic participation in local education governance. By reducing financial barriers to entry, this legislation ensures that qualified candidates from all socioeconomic backgrounds have a fair opportunity to seek office. Our school boards should reflect the full diversity of the communities they serve, and this bill helps make that possible.

Public campaign financing can powerfully promote transparency and accountability, increase public confidence in the electoral process, and encourage greater voter participation in essential local elections. In Howard County, I not only voted for our Local Public Campaign Financing through our Citizen Election Fund (CEF) but also helped override the legislation's veto by the previous Howard County Executive in 2017. Since becoming County Executive, I have gladly funded our program with an investment of more than \$3.5 million. Our program continues to demonstrate success. In fact, the prior county executive, who previously vetoed the initiative, utilized the fund during the 2022 election cycle. To date, this fund has supported eleven total candidates in Howard County.

House Bill 962 builds upon an existing legal framework that already authorizes counties to implement public financing for executive and legislative offices. Extending this option to school boards is a logical expansion. The bill maintains voluntary participation, provides for local control, and ensures oversight by the State Board of Elections, safeguarding both flexibility and integrity. Ultimately, HB 962 can level and widen the field for local school board candidates, especially given those races are designed to be nonpartisan and further removed from political machinations. As a result, across Maryland, we can help create more inclusive and competitive school board elections.

I urge the Committee's **support for HB962**. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive