

Testimony of Edward Fischman In Support of HB 1378

Chair Wells and the Members of the GLE Committee:

I am Edward Fischman, a long-time resident and activist in Montgomery County, and a leader in Our Revolution Maryland. I want to thank Delegate Terrasa, Lehman and Ruth for bringing forward this long overdue, but also very timely legislation, which aligns with Our Revolution's efforts to remove dark money from our politics, and push back against the takeover of our politics by billionaires and their corporate interests.

I expect you will hear and read chapter and verse about the capture of agencies and legislatures by corporations. I will not try to compete with economic experts who can share their data, but I can share my political observations. Maryland is in a better place than Virginia, which has no restriction on direct donations by corporations. There, Dominion Energy has long dominated the politics of the state. Their influence, thus, has extended well beyond the financial concerns of their business.

Though Maryland does limit direct contributions, Maryland is hardly immune from the outsized influence of dark money and spending by corporations and their hired guns. In the last cycle AIPAC-related organizations spent over \$1 million on one Congressional race. That is not healthy for our democracy. Businesses here also have outsized influence, as witnessed by the slow progress on closing dirty energy facilities.

Free speech is a right which belongs to individuals. Corporations have gotten a foot in the door, and the blew it wide open. The money they throw into our politics means that most individuals cannot have a meaningful say, because they are largely unable to get their voices heard. In this, the public speech marketplace is not entirely unlike X.com, which has the trappings of a giant town hall, but only those with blue checks are able to get seen and heard. The algorithm literally pushes everybody else to the bottom of the thread, seen only by their followers. The discourse that rises to the top is wildly skewed, and this can create all sorts of false impressions about public opinion, even among the most sincere and open political actors.

Of course, the effects of this spending can be even more insidious, pointing more towards corruption. Certainly, the public views much of our politics as reflecting corrupt dealings with the rich and powerful. That perception is toxic to our politics, and it must also impact your dealings with the public. It does not have to be this way.

Citizens United and its progeny have touched off an arms race in political spending, but it is largely a one-sided war. Some states are beginning to push back. Maryland should join the fight.

I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1378

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