



## **Testimony in Support of SB 627**

### **Before the Senate Education, Health and Environment Affairs Committee**

**March 3, 2011**

By Susan Wichmann  
Executive Director, Common Cause Maryland

Common Cause Maryland is a nonpartisan, non-profit, citizen lobby that works to improve the way Maryland's government operates. Common Cause has more than 400,000 members around the country and 36 state chapters. We have approximately 4,000 members in Maryland.

Madam chair and members of the committee thank you for taking the time to receive my testimony.

Common Cause's mission is to fight for open and transparent government that works for the people. When headlines are dominated by scandal, as they have been recently regarding Prince Georges County my phone rings. Reporters call me and ask for a comment on the following questions; "Is pay-to-play pervasive in Prince Georges County?" "Is pay-to-play a problem in other counties?" "Is pay-to-play a problem for the entire state of Maryland?"

When one elected official engage in self-dealing that brings them more money or power them it causes a problem for all elected officials. This is particularly true when there is not transparency and openness in the way the government makes its decisions. The press and citizens alike began to question who government is working for themselves or the citizens. The actions of a few in these cases cast taint on all of those who serve regardless of those individuals actions. We already live in a time when government official's motives are routinely questioned and as with many things in our world today the idea that this is a systematic problem spreads rapidly and becomes a contagion. Ultimately, this belief that government doesn't work for everyone effects business investment, property values and lowers the quality of life for those who live those jurisdictions.

Justice Brennan famously stated that "sunlight is the best disinfectant." Passing meaningful and difficult reform that makes the government's decision making process open and transparent is a necessary step in restoring the people's faith in their government and in you as their elected officials. Senate bill 627 in an important element to restoring that faith and I urge you to support it.