



Maryland
COMMON CAUSE
Holding Power Accountable

November 2015

Common Cause Maryland is a non-partisan, grassroots organization dedicated to restoring the core values of American democracy, reinventing an open, honest and accountable government that works in the public interest, and empowering ordinary people to make their voices heard.

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Email:
CCMD@CommonCause.org
Phone: 410-268-7470
PO Box 942,
Annapolis, MD 21404

Dear Friend,

Sometimes it feels like we are on the retreat. From presidential debates that bring out the worst in our candidates, to continued threats of a government shutdown, to attacks on voting rights and government accountability across the nation, there are days when we begin to wonder if our democracy is broken.

But then days come when the sun shines brightly. This November we saw some serious sunshine, and that light was reflected in the banner headline in the Huffington Post after the elections: "Voters Chip Away at *Citizens United*." Voters across the country showed they are fed up with money in politics and politicians writing the rules for themselves, and stood up on Election Day to bring balance back to our democracy.

In Maine and Seattle, reforms passed that will tighten campaign finance laws and bolster small-donor public funding programs – gathering 55 and 60 percent support, respectively. And in Ohio, 71 percent of voters endorsed an effort to end legislative gerrymandering by creating a bipartisan commission to draw district lines.

These voters turned cynicism about the breakdown of our politics into action and optimism. Now, it is up to us to bring that momentum home to Maryland.

We have an incredible opportunity this coming legislative session to advance core reforms – expanding access to voting, fixing our rigged redistricting process, and fighting back against the flood of dark money in our elections. These reforms would not only move Maryland forward, but they would set a bar for democracy reforms in other states.

From now until April, we have important work to do and we need your help. Thanks to you – your support, your engagement, and your relentless faith in democracy – Common Cause is strong in Maryland and we have a chance to make serious progress for democracy.

As we head into the legislative session, we will look to you to continue to support our efforts and demand change. Because no one will do this for us – and the stakes are too high to sit on the sidelines.

Thank you for all you do,

*Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Executive Director
and the team at Common Cause Maryland*

In the news:

“There is a way, however, to amplify the voices of people who lack bulging bank accounts so that they can be heard as well — without using the highly problematic and Sisyphean route of amending the Constitution or waiting years for the Supreme Court to reverse its damaging decisions.”

- Phil Andrews
Former Councilmember,
Montgomery County
(Baltimore Sun Op-Ed,
May 2015)

Fair Elections

Maryland is leading the way in the fight against Citizens United and the flood of money in our political system. We are tackling the problem from two directions: working to curtail the role and influence of dark money, and giving power back to the people through small-donor matching fund programs.

We cannot change the Supreme Court, but we can fight back against its dangerous rulings on dark money. We are working on a suite of reforms that would keep democracy working in Maryland, such

as ensuring that Super PACs are not secretly working with candidates, lifting the veil of secrecy from our largest donors, and protecting our judicial system from high-stakes politics.

We are fighting to give power back to everyday people through small-donor matching fund programs. We are taking the fair elections victory in Montgomery County last year to the rest of the state, and are excited at the momentum already building in Howard County for this empowering reform.

We will also ramp up our efforts to protect the U.S. Constitution. A Constitutional Convention in this era of unregulated political contributions would be extraordinarily dangerous.

A corporate-sponsored re-write of our Constitution could put all of our most cherished freedoms, rights, and protections in jeopardy. Maryland should rescind its existing convention call and not advance any others.

In the news:

“Gerrymandering ultimately subverts accountability through elections. And without accountability, we have no reason to expect representation.”

- Todd Eberly
Political Science Professor,
St. Mary's College
(Maryland Reporter, Sept
2015)

Tame the Gerrymander

This November, Governor Hogan's study commission finalized a bold plan to take the politics out of our redistricting process. (We were proud to have a board member serve.) Their recommendations include:

- An independent commission should draw congressional and legislative districts.
- The commission would be politically diverse, with three members from each of the two dominant political parties and three additional

members from neither party. The applicants would go through a screening process and a lottery. Elected officials, candidates, lobbyists, and staff would be prohibited from serving.

- The commission would draw lines without regard to party affiliation or incumbent residency.
- The commission would hold “ample” public hearings on the proposed plan. The legislature could reject the map through

a supermajority vote.

- District lines should be compact, be contiguous, and respect county and municipal lines.
- State legislative districts should be more consistent in size.

We know there is a desire among Marylanders to change our rigged system. The commission's strong recommendations will set the bar for the General Assembly this session, and hopefully we will have something we can be proud to vote for in November.

Transparency

Open and transparent government is a fundamental building block of an accountable democracy. We lead the Marylanders for Open Government Coalition, which is tackling a range of issues around three key areas: access to public records, open meetings, and budgeting and procurement.

Last year we built support for a massive update to our state's public information laws, increasing public access to public records. Although the legislation

passed, there is still a lot of work to do to ensure that the law is fully implemented.

This fall the Governor must appoint the Public Information Compliance Board, and the Attorney General must hire the new ombudsperson. Over the next two years the Attorney General's office will study the law to see what other changes need to be made.

Maryland's Open Meetings Act, as well as the state's budgeting and procurement processes,

need the same massive updating that our Public Information Act received last year. This year we hope to raise the issues that need addressing and begin to make progress fixing them.

One area that we anticipate will receive a lot of attention this coming year is transparency in police practices. From body cameras to citizen complaints, we will monitor legislation to ensure that it strikes the right balance between public access and private safety.

In the news:

"Last week, promising to sign the first major reform of Maryland's Public Information Act in 45 years, Gov. Larry Hogan called the measure 'a step in the right direction.' It is indeed. And the ultimate beneficiaries will be ordinary Marylanders trying to get a look at information their government has used their tax money to gather."

- Annapolis Capital
(Editorial, April 2015)

Access to Voting

This year across the country we have seen an unprecedented attack on voting rights. Luckily Maryland is poised to take some strong steps forward, recognizing the importance of this critical democratic right.

We hope the General Assembly will act swiftly to reinstate legislation that will restore voting rights to 40,000 Marylanders by streamlining the process through which former felons regain their ability to vote.

We are also excited to bring to Maryland the discussion around automatic voter registration, modernizing our systems so that every eligible voter is registered and able to participate in our democracy.

We are concerned about the rollout of the new voting systems. While secure paper trail systems are a huge step forward to ensure the integrity of our elections, there is no funding for the voter education

that is needed to make the transition a success.

We will work with our partners to ensure that not only are there aggressive get-out-the-vote efforts next spring, but that they are coupled with voter education and building a team of volunteer poll monitors. We must work together to ensure the 2016 elections go off without a hitch—particularly in our local elections, including Baltimore City.

In the news:

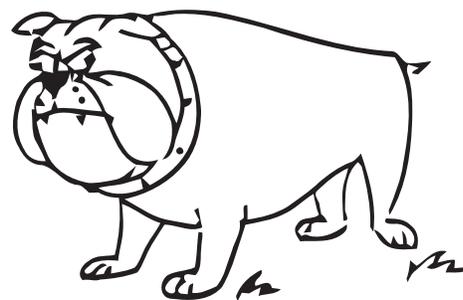
"Restoring [former felons'] ability to have a say in choosing their elected representatives — the most fundamental of all democratic rights — should be an obvious element of [their] reintegration."

- New York Times
(Editorial, June 2015)

Common Cause Maryland is the people's watchdog.
But we can't do this work without your support.

**PLEASE MAKE A DONATION TODAY TO SUPPORT
A STRONGER DEMOCRACY TOMORROW!**

The legislative session is just around the corner, and we need YOUR support to make our work on redistricting, fair elections, and voter access a success. Please support our work today! Give online at md.commoncause.org.



Common Cause Maryland
PO Box 942
Annapolis, MD 21401



Left: Executive Director Jennifer Bevan-Dangel speaks at a national conference about redistricting reform. Right: Lt. Gov. Rutherford speaks at the 3rd annual birthday commemoration for Elbridge Gerry. Below left: Ralph Watkins (League of Women Voters) reads the recipe for "Gerrymander Cake" while an interested crowd (below right) listens.

