

# 2017 Legislative Agenda



The 2017 legislative session is underway, and proving to be as busy as ever. While there are many bills introduced this year that would improve how democracy functions in Maryland, the bills listed below reflect our priorities for the remainder of the 90-day session. Our 2017 policy priorities include:

## Campaign Finance

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There are two sides to campaign finance reform. One is through programs, commonly known as public funding or citizen's election funds, that engage more people in our campaigns, both as donors and as candidates. The other is laws that put stricter rules in place for how major donors seek to influence our campaigns. Maryland has the opportunity to make progress on both this session.

- ❖ **Ensure that Gubernatorial Public Financing Remains Viable** – After the 2014 campaigns, the Gubernatorial public campaign fund was almost entirely depleted. We must ensure that the program is viable for future candidates. **HB 72 (Del. Luedtke)** would ensure that the program has enough funds to finance two participating candidates in any election year, and **the Governor's budget** includes \$1 million repayment to the fund.
- ❖ **Put a Stop to Candidate and Super PAC Coordination** – Unlike Federal law, Maryland law currently does not define coordination – meaning that candidates can easily circumvent campaign donation limits by working together with Super PACs, entities that can receive unlimited campaign contributions. This bill (**HB 898, Del. Ebersole**) would define coordination in Maryland law, reducing the role of outside spenders in our elections.
- ❖ **Close Loopholes in Current Law** – Maryland can fill in where federal law is unclear, and ensure foreign companies are not allowed to spend money to influence our ballot campaigns (**SB 130, Sen. Simonaire**). We can also strengthen our state law to meet federal standards by requiring loans to campaigns are done through traditional lending mechanisms, ensuring the funds will be repaid (**SB 259 Sen. Bates, HB 551 Del. Cluster**).

## Access to Voting

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Maryland has a robust system for voter registration and access to the poll, but there are a few critical reforms that would tear down the last barriers to voting and make us a true national leader. We are working to fix discrete issues identified in the 2016 elections, while working to pass legislation that makes voting more accessible for all Marylanders.

- ❖ **Election Day Registration** – Marylanders can currently register to vote during early voting, but those who show up on the actual election day are restricted from doing so. This disparity is confusing and unnecessary, and this session we are working on legislation (**SB 423 Sen. Pinsky, HB 345 Del. Reznik**) that would ensure anyone qualified to vote can do so when they show up to the polls.
- ❖ **Increase Incentives for Election Judges** – Many of the problems we saw in Maryland's primary came from the fact that we simply do not have enough qualified, trained election judges. We can help to ensure that every County's elections run more smoothly by passing **HB 73 (Del. Luedtke)**, allowing anyone qualified to register to vote to work the polls and requiring that poll workers are paid a minimum wage.
- ❖ **Ensure Every Vote is Counted in Every Election** – We appreciate the continued attention by the legislature on key reforms that would modernize our registration system to ensure every eligible voter is registered (**HB 741**) and expand special elections to all openings in office (**HB 361**). While we have made progress on these reforms in past years, there is more work to do to ensure every vote counts.

## Redistricting Reform

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There has never been more momentum behind reforming our rigged redistricting process. From the national focus on this issue from leaders such as former President Obama and former Governor O'Malley to the current leadership from Governor Hogan and the work of the Redistricting Commission, there is clear consensus that the process must change.

- ❖ **Redistricting Reform Act of 2017** – The **Governor's** legislation (**SB 252, HB 385**) would create an independent commission to draw legislative and Congressional district lines, set compactness standards for our Congressional districts, and ensure transparency and meaningful opportunity for public comment in the process.

## Transparency and Accountability

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Open and transparent government is critical for an accountable democracy. Too often, decisions or public records are kept behind closed doors. There is significant work to do in this area, though legislation has been introduced that would take discreet steps forward:

- ❖ **Legislative Transparency Act** – The **Governor's** transparency bill (**SB 253**) advances three reforms that we have worked on for the last few years, including: 1) live streaming and archival of General Assembly Floor Sessions, standing committee hearings, and voting sessions; 2) Disclosure of dinners and receptions for executive employees paid for by registered lobbyists; and 3) Ensuring that public bodies are aware of and fulfill their responsibilities under the Open Meetings Act.
- ❖ **Police Accountability** – We will work to ensure that Marylanders have access to the outcomes of complaints they file against police in Maryland, ensuring that those complaints are meaningfully responded to (**SB 362 Sen. Conway, HB 698 Del. Barron**).
- ❖ **Live Streaming Election Board Meetings** – We are always supportive of reforms that not only advance a goal but also impact an agency we work with. We support legislation (**SB 91 Sen. Kagan, HB 169 Del Korman**), which would require the State Board to live stream their meetings. This bill would ease the burden on local board officials who currently must drive long distances to monitor the discussion, while also making the State Boards' processes more accessible to every Marylander.

## Other Initiatives

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This year we have seen a renewed interest in ethics reforms, reflecting the heightened awareness of ethical concerns at the state and national levels. We also continue our work to protect our constitution against unprecedented attack.

- ❖ **Public Integrity Act of 2017** – The **Governor's** bill (**SB 683**) would make five changes to the state's ethics law, including shifting ethics oversight of the legislature to the State Ethics Commission and tightening revolving door, conflict of interest, and reporting requirements. This legislation includes many new ideas worthy of serious deliberation.
- ❖ **Liquor Board Reforms** – We are grateful to see the quick and forceful response to the FBI bribery investigation from the **Governor (SB 684)**, the **Prince George's County Senators (SB 488)**, and the **Prince George's Executive**. We urge the legislature to review the bills and advance the strongest package of reforms.
- ❖ **Avert a Constitutional Crisis** – Special interests continue to advance calls for Constitutional Conventions in the states. We will continue to fight Constitutional Convention calls on every issue, while we work to rescind the four calls in Maryland's past (**SJ 2 Sen. Madaleno, HJ 2 Del. Frick**).