

2018 Legislative Preview

Common Cause Maryland is ready for a busy 2018 legislative session. We'll be working with our coalitions and legislative partners to continue working toward fair elections that allow every Marylander who wants a voice in the process to have one. Our 2018 policy priorities include:

Campaign Finance

We'll continue to push for discrete reforms to close loopholes wealthy interests use to advance their interests in our elections while pushing for the holy grail of money in politics reform – small donor funded elections.

- ❖ **Ensure that Gubernatorial Public Financing Remains Viable** – After the 2014 campaigns, the Gubernatorial Public Campaign Fund was almost entirely depleted. Sadly, this leaves the Gubernatorial program unprepared for 2018's elections and capable of only supporting a single primary campaign. We must do better to provide avenues for candidates to run without relying on wealthy interests to back them.
- ❖ **Stop Scam PACs** – In the past few years, we've witnessed a rise in PACs formed solely to prey upon enthusiasm for candidates. These organizations mislead Americans into believing that the PAC was formed to support a candidate, when funds end up going solely toward the benefit of those who started the PAC. We are working with Del. Ebersole to put a stop to these shady practices.
- ❖ **Ban LLC Donations** – LLC donations provide wealthy interests with an easy way to circumvent current donation limits to candidates. Attempts have been made in the past to "close the LLC loophole," however, our summer 2017 research into Baltimore City's mayoral election show that these efforts have not stopped highly questionable methods of LLC giving. Federal candidates cannot accept corporate or LLC donations – why should Maryland be behind the ball here?
- ❖ **Root Out Illicit LLC Giving** – While we would rather put a complete stop to LLC giving in Maryland, an interim step would direct the State Board of Elections to connect donation disclosures to SDAT, so that regulators can more easily detect donations made with fake LLC information.
- ❖ **Update Municipal Campaign Finance Codes** – Third party mailers sent out during the Annapolis mayoral elections showed that most municipalities are woefully behind the times. Working with Del. Moon, we can make sure that jurisdictions are providing the level of transparency their citizens require.
- ❖ **Create Statewide Small Dollar Donor Program** – In 2013, the General Assembly authorized counties to create small-dollar matching programs so that candidates for County Council could run for office without needing to seek backing from wealthy interests. Since then, Montgomery County and Howard County have adopted such programs, and Prince George's appears to be right behind them. We must expand these programs to statewide offices to ensure that every candidate with community support can have a chance at representing their peers, regardless of whether they have wealthy connections.

Access to Voting

We are working with the State Board of Elections, legislative partners, and our voting rights coalition to fix discrete security 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 with Del. Reznik and Sen. Pinsky to make it so that anyone qualified to vote can do so when they show up to the polls.

- ❖ **Secure and Accessible Registration Act** - Modernize our voter registration system and increase opportunities to register to vote. This legislation would seamlessly register eligible Marylanders to vote whenever they interact with certain Maryland agencies. This policy would help to register more voters, keep voting rolls cleaner, and increase accuracy and security in the registration process.
- ❖ **The Secure Our Elections Act** – 2016 saw unprecedented attempts by foreign entities to infiltrate and compromise our election systems. Maryland must take these threats seriously. This legislation would close some vulnerabilities that currently exist in our voting systems, help to ensure that our State Board has the expertise necessary to keep on top of emergent threats, and create vital tools to help detect any irregularities.
- ❖ **Special Elections to Fill Vacancies in the General Assembly** – When legislative seats are made vacant, replacements are chosen by central party committees in a manner that is often opaque and sometimes riddled with conflicts of interest. We're working with Del. Moon to make sure that whenever possible, voters choose their own legislators to fill these vacant seats.

Redistricting Reform

Governor Hogan's election in 2014 brought with it possible pathways forward on creating real redistricting reform. The Governor has thankfully reconvened his Redistricting Commission and will once again submit legislation on the issue. We continue to press on:

- ❖ **Support the Governor's Redistricting Legislation:** We were incredibly pleased with both the makeup of Governor Hogan's Redistricting Commission, as well as the recommendations they made. We will continue to support the Governor's proposals in this area, while looking to work with the Legislature on any amendments that can improve the legislation.

Transparency and Accountability

Open and transparent government is critical for an accountable democracy. We continue in our role as a watch dog and resource on the issue.

- ❖ **Prevent Misuse of the Public Information Act** – Recently, some in Maryland have misused the Public Information Act to collect bulk contact information on Marylanders for commercial and political use. We will work with Montgomery County legislators to ensure that Marylanders are not discouraged from reaching out to their elected officials by this behavior.
- ❖ **Protect Presumption of Disclosure Under PIA** – We're working to ensure that no matter what, the Public Information Act is accessible to everyone.

Common Cause Maryland is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to restoring the core values of American democracy. Founded in 1974, CCMD is one of the state's most effective watchdog groups.

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