



Maryland
COMMON CAUSE
Holding Power Accountable

April 2015

Common Cause Maryland is a nonpartisan, 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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Dear Friend,

This has been a tremendous year!. As the Maryland General Assembly session clock ticked to a close, our priority bills hung in the balance. But we are glad to report that with minutes to spare the final picture was clear: this year the legislators made huge strides toward making government work better for you and all Marylanders.

Governor Hogan and members of the legislature felt the high level of discontent from their constituents about how government is functioning and they took action – investing in fair elections, opening access to public information, and expanding access to voting. They demonstrated a willingness do what Congress seemingly cannot; tackle important issues and make government more responsive to its citizens.

Key victories include:

- Restoring funding to the Fair Campaign Finance Fund, the small-donor matching program for gubernatorial candidates, and making the program stronger.
- Updating the Maryland Public Information Act to ensure that fees and exemptions are not used to deny public access to information, and creating an oversight body with authority to mediate disputes regarding public requests for information;
- Expanding voting rights to roughly 40,000 Marylanders by clarifying the laws that permit formerly incarcerated persons to vote.

We had an aggressive and far-reaching agenda this session. Our policy expertise, coalition building, and tireless lobbying led the way on these, and other, critical reforms. Common Cause Maryland was your voice in Annapolis.

But this is just the beginning. We have a lot on our plate in the months to come: working with Governor Hogan's commission to study redistricting reform, advancing fair elections at the county level, and monitoring Maryland's transition to secure, paper-trail voting machines.

Our work over the next year will be challenging—but with your support, we know we can continue to make government work for you and for all Marylanders.

Thank you for all you do,

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel and the team at Common Cause Maryland

In the news:

“In fact, the [Supreme Court] decision is a potent argument in favor of public financing of elections as a counterweight to the court’s green light to wealthy donors. It’s hard to think of a better time to empower small donors by leveraging public funding to amplify their influence.”

(Washington Post)

Fair Elections

Even as the Supreme Court continues to assault sensible limits on money in politics—first opening the door to unlimited independent spending with *Citizens United* and then in *McCutcheon* giving a green light to big donors enabling them to wield undue influence on our election process—Maryland is fighting back.

We are fighting back with smart, sensible solutions that amplify citizens’ voices in elections. Nothing gives citizens a bigger megaphone than fair campaign programs. By matching small-dollar donations, regular citizens can become major donors and candidates can run competitive campaigns

focused on their constituents.

Montgomery County made history last September by passing the first fair-campaign program since *Citizen’s United*. This program is a model for other counties and the state. Common Cause Maryland is working hard to ensure that Montgomery County funds the program each year to ensure that candidates can use this option in the 2018 election.

At the state level, the Governor and the legislature took the most critical step forward this year; restoring funding to the Fair Campaign Financing Fund.

They also tightened up reporting requirements for entities doing business with the state (SB 767, Conway; HB 769, Turner) and established reporting requirements for inaugural events (HB 775, Frick).

Over the summer we will be advancing fair election legislation in other counties around the state, and next year we will work to strengthen and expand our state fair elections program and tighten up loopholes exposed in the last campaign cycle.



In the news:

“Maryland’s 3rd Congressional District... has been compared to a Rorschach test and a crime scene blood spatter spread across Central Maryland. The New Republic called it ‘America’s Most Gerrymandered Congressional District’; Roll Call said its boundaries frame a ‘Pinwheel of Death’... [A] federal judge... declared it ‘reminiscent of a broken-winged pterodactyl, lying prostrate across the center of the state.’

(Baltimore Sun)

Tame the Gerrymander

States across the nation draw new congressional and legislative district boundary lines every ten years. These districts should represent changes to the population and reflect the ideal of “one person, one vote.”

Unfortunately, it’s too easy to play politics with this process. Maryland ranks worst in the nation when it comes to district compactness. Our current legislative maps have been called “comically gerrymandered,” causing some to ask how a Congressperson could fairly represent a district that “slices and dices counties, communities and neighborhoods”.

Gerrymandered districts not only make it difficult for legislators to know and represent their constituents but it marginalizes votes and undermines confidence in the democratic process.

Common Cause Maryland is working with the League of Women Voters and the Annapolis Section of the National Council of Jewish Women to build support for reform.

Last year we held several high-profile events, including a political cartoon contest, the Gerrymander Meander (a 225-mile relay run around District 3), and a forum on policy solutions, to draw

public attention to our broken redistricting process.

Our work is bearing fruit. Governor Hogan announced in his State of the State address that he would appoint a commission to study how to change the process by which Maryland draws its district lines. The Executive Order establishing that commission is anticipated this spring.

We are grateful for Governor Hogan’s leadership and that of Senators Kelley and Pinsky and Delegates Afzali, Flanagan, Gutierrez, McComas, Miele, and Parrot for championing reform this legislative session.

Transparency

Giving citizens access to government data and decision making are fundamental pillars of effective democracy. Allowing access to public documents and having open meetings enables transparency and accountability for government decisions.

Yet nationally Maryland consistently ranks poorly on transparency scorecards. In 2012, the State Integrity Investigation gave the state a D-, ranking Maryland 40th among the states. We scored particularly poorly for public access to information; we received an F.

But that's starting to change, this year legislators took a huge step toward more open, transparent govern-

ment by updating the Public Information Act for the first time in 45 years. Common Cause Maryland was the leader in this effort to create an oversight body with authority to mediate disputes around public requests for data and ensures that fees and exemptions cannot be used to deny citizens access to public records (SB695, Raskin/HB755, Cullison).

We fought for legislation requiring state agencies to publicly post the contact information for their Public Information Act officer (SB852, Young/HB674, Barron) and to clarify when public records should be available upon request (SB444, Ready/HB 83,

Krebs).

Finally we supported legislation that will study the state's procurement process, laying the foundation for future reforms (SB 662, Sen. Ready/Del. Miele). Watch for this in the future, as we will be fighting to make sure this is a priority for the Administration and legislators for the next few years.

We will also continue to advocate for reforms that improve transparency in the process itself, such as requiring agendas in advance of public meetings and ensuring that those meetings are truly open.

In the news:

"Government transparency was poised for a major advance with the first major overhaul of the state's public records laws in a generation. Reporters and ordinary citizens alike are supposed to have access to the vast majority of public records in Maryland. But those who rely on the state's Public Information Act to keep tabs on what the state and local governments are doing often wind up frustrated.... Legislation... would seek to provide the public with some more practical redress."

(Baltimore Sun)

Access to Voting

Voting is one of the most fundamental rights granted to us. By participating in our democracy we are contributing to the building of our nation and our communities. This is a right that should be accessible to all.

This year voting rights were strengthened in several important ways. The legislature:

- ◆ Restored voting rights to roughly 40,000 Marylanders by clarifying existing laws that permit formerly incarcerated persons to vote (SB340, Conway/HB980, McCray).
- ◆ Created a process to pro-

tect voters from intimidation or harassment as it occurs (SB192, Pinsky/HB73, Rosenberg).

- ◆ Ensured that petition gatherers do not have their efforts undermined by a bad process (SB193, Bates/HB284, Flanagan).

Frequently, the introduction of a bill starts a dialogue on an issue, but the bill may take several years to be passed into law. This year, a set of bills was introduced that sought to reform the process for filling vacant legislative seats to give citizens a voice (SB166, Feldman/HB604, Moon; HB806, Miele).

Delegate Hixson also introduced legislation to ensure all Marylanders are registered to vote by creating automatic registration through state agencies. This reform first advanced in Oregon and should be replicated in Maryland.

This summer, we will work to ensure that the transition to new voting machines goes smoothly. In the final hours of the budget negotiations, some critical funding for this transition was lost. Maryland must have paper-trail machines fully operational for the 2016 elections.

In the news:

"We applaud the efforts of the courageous grassroots advocates across Maryland who fought for this legislation," said Judith Browne Dianis, a co-director of the Advancement Project. "There are endless benefits to restoring voting rights for people released from incarceration, including the fostering of full community integration and the fulfillment of our core democratic principles."

(www.msnbc.com)

**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 might be over—but our work on redistricting, fair elections, and voter access is just beginning. Please support our work today—you can give online at md.commoncause.org.



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Taming the Gerrymander

Pterodactyls came to Annapolis to urge gerrymandering to go the way of the dinosaur...
Over 100 attended a forum on reform...
Runners celebrated the end of the Gerrymander Meander at the State House

