

COMMON CAUSE DELAWARE TESTIMONY

House Administration Committee
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In 2013, former Chief Justice E. Norman Veasey issued a comprehensive report on campaign finance reform in Delaware, generally referred to as [The Veasey Report](#). His independent investigation came in the wake of campaign finance violations by Chris Tigani and others, some of which resulted in jail time.

Since its publication, Common Cause Delaware has strongly advocated for the reforms called for in the Veasey Report. Some were implemented years ago, but the agenda remains unfinished. HB 366 would implement three more Veasey reforms, and we strongly urge the House Administration Committee to vote yes on the bill.

At its most comprehensive, the Veasey Report called for the legal and cultural reform of Delaware's "pay to play" political culture that has been "rationalized by some as consistent with a cynical perception of the 'Delaware Way.'" The Report found *that* perception of the "Delaware Way" unacceptable and inconsistent with the views of everyday Delawareans, and it called for an "end" to "pay to play" ... practices" (15) in the First State.

While HB 366 would not eliminate every instance of pay-to-play culture, it would significantly advance the unfinished Veasey agenda in three ways.

First, the bill would require donors to provide their employer and occupation when they make political contributions to state candidates, as is already required for federal contributions. The Veasey Report made this recommendation because Christopher Tigani received three felony convictions for enlisting his employees to make political contributions that he then reimbursed. Making that simple change in the type of information required from donors would make such schemes easier to detect.

Even if no malfeasance is afoot, however, requiring that donors list employer and occupation would provide a greater level of transparency that would strengthen democracy in Delaware. That is to say, right now, if a voter is concerned about a bill that favors a particular industry, such as real estate, they can search for real estate entities who donated to particular legislators. What they currently cannot do is discern how many individual realtors have donated. If donors were required to list employer and occupation, that information would be easily accessible, and that would strengthen campaign integrity in the First State.

Second, HB 366 would forbid candidates who are caught accepting prohibited campaign contributions from donating those ill-gotten gains to a charity to make themselves look good,

another reform suggested by Chief Justice Veasey. Instead, illegal donations would have to be returned to the donor or given to the state's General Fund.

Third, HB 366 would require the Department of Elections to provide a telephone number and online form for reporting suspected violations of campaign finance laws, another recommendation in the Veasey Report.

Finally, HB 366 contains a fourth component that is in the spirit of the Veasey Report. That is, it would strengthen campaign finance law by requiring that candidate reports actually be reviewed and approved by the Department of Elections. This makes sense because why bother having campaign finance requirements, if they are easily ignored?

It has been almost ten years since Chief Justice Veasey issued his report, and many people have probably forgotten about it, about the campaign finance abuses that gave rise to it, and about the report's recommendations. But now is the time to remember. We do not need to dwell on the past, but we should remember former goals and take precautions to make sure that past crimes are not easily replicated.

We also urge the Legislature to take the remaining reforms recommended in the Veasey report. Corporate contributions are a big piece of that unfinished business, and we urge legislators to pass legislation banning them next session. At least [20 states prohibit](#) corporations from making political contributions, and Delaware should join that list. Our government is supposed to be "for the people" – and that principle is undermined when corporations are "investing" hundreds of thousands of dollars in state politics, each election cycle.

