



Maryland
COMMON CAUSE
Holding Power Accountable

December 2016

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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Dear Friend,

As the seasons change from fall to winter, the days grow shorter and sometimes you get the feeling that the darkness will just keep coming. At the end of a year that featured one of the most divisive political campaigns in modern history, punctuated by accusations of foreign interference in our elections and a waning interest in democratic governance from our nation's youth, it's difficult to not feel a similar malaise when thinking about the future.

But even during our darkest days there are moments of light that keep us striving through the winter. This election season was highly contentious, yes, but it also brought about huge victories in races across the country where good government reforms won the day. Citizen-funded election programs, which raise the voices of average voters, won on the ballot from Berkeley to Howard County. Ethics reforms won with voters from Rhode Island to San Francisco. And voting reforms, such as ranked choice voting in Maine and automatic voting registration in Alaska, passed from sea to shining sea.

Voters across the country, across party lines, showed that they were fed up with politics as usual.

The results of many races across the country in the 2016 elections have shown the incredible opportunities ahead for continuing to strengthen the voices of regular American voters in our elections and for continuing to broaden access to the franchise. But the 2016 elections also reminded us of our solemn duty to defend democratic norms, and to proselytize those values to ensure that every American has a voice in the direction of our country.

We will heed these lessons by continuing to advance reforms that will benefit every Marylander while engaging more than ever in the processes of governance – reforms such as election day registration, a fair and open redistricting process, and transparency in government. ***These reforms would not only move Maryland forward, they would set a bar for democracy reforms in other states.***

Now, more than ever, Maryland has an opportunity to lead – to show the world that Americans of different political persuasions can still come together to do what is right *because it is right*, not because it is advantageous. But we cannot do it without your help. Thanks to you – your support, your engagement, and your relentless faith in democracy – Common Cause is strong in Maryland and we can still set an example in the pursuit of a more perfect union.

Thank you for all you do,

Jennifer Bevan-Dangel and the team at Common Cause Maryland

In the news:

“Fortunately for Howard residents, there is a possible solution at hand. Tucked away on the Nov. 8 ballot... is Question A... No longer would county leaders be beholden to developers or other big contributors — or even suffer the appearance of being beholden.”

- “Yes on Howard’s Question A”
(Baltimore Sun, October, 2016)

Fair Elections

Maryland continues to forge ahead in the fight for elections that represent the will of voters instead of the preferences of wealthy interests. In 2017, we’ll be taking on that fight from multiple fronts – by working to lessen the influence of Super PACs and other moneyed interests on Maryland elections, and by raising up the voices of regular Maryland voters.

While we cannot change the Supreme Court, we can lead successful efforts to diminish the

impacts of decisions like Citizens United and provide examples to policy makers throughout the country on how to best craft democracy reforms that lift the voices of everyday Americans.

In 2017, we’ll continue the fight to give power back to everyday people through small-donor matching fund programs. In November, Howard County voters decided to make their county the second in the state to adopt such a program. We’ll work in the surrounding counties to spread these programs

to places like Prince Georges and Baltimore City, while continuing to work in Howard and Montgomery to ensure their programs are effective and adequately funded.

We will also work with the legislature to create strong coordination rules, to insure that groups making independent expenditures are truly independent – and not coordinating with campaigns in order to get around spending limits.

In the news:

“Hogan has extended the life of the redistricting commission by a year. But the panel has already drawn up a solid plan... That sounds pretty good from our standpoint here in Anne Arundel County, a jurisdiction sliced and diced into four of the state’s eight congressional districts.”

- “Our say: On Redistricting, Hogan should try, try again”
(Capital Gazette, November 2016)

Tame the Gerrymander

Last session, Governor Hogan introduced legislation that would do away with Maryland’s gerrymandered districts and create an independent, fair redistricting system that would give no preference to incumbents or party membership. Unfortunately, the bill never moved out of committee.

Governor Hogan has once again reconvened his redistricting commission and we are working closely with them to

make another push for reform in 2017. We will continue to push for Governor Hogan’s recommendations, which include:

- An independent commission to draw congressional and legislative districts
- District lines drawn without regard to party affiliation or incumbent residency
- Public hearings held by the commission to ensure input from Maryland voters

- District lines drawn in a compact and contiguous manner, respecting county and municipal lines

Additionally, we have reached out to new allies to partake in more targeted grassroots efforts to educate members of the General Assembly about how important this issue is to so many Marylanders who are tired of the rigged system.

Transparency

Open and transparent government practices are vital to ensuring citizens' faith in democracy. We continue to lead the Marylanders for Open Government Coalition, which continues to grow into a more diverse organization, now encompassing good government groups, unions, consumer advocates,

and county civic organizations.

We persist in building upon our successes – we are working closely with the Attorney General's office as they prepare a study that will lay the groundwork for future Public Information Act reforms. We will continue to be a strong presence in this process to ensure that the Public

Information Act reflects the transparency Marylanders demand from their government.

Additionally, we will continue to be a resource for legislators, the public, and Maryland-based media on issues of transparency – providing advice and perspective on a variety of transparency issues as they crop up.

In the news:

“Maryland's citizens have the right to know how government transacts business on their behalf... However, there is significant progress to be made regarding transparency in Maryland”

-Rebecca Snyder,
Press Association
(Baltimore Sun Op-Ed,
October, 2016)

Access to Voting

While attacks on the voting rights of millions of Americans, and on the very integrity of the election system itself, continue throughout the country, Maryland continues to show the value of protecting and expanding this most sacred of democratic rights.

We are proud that our advocacy helped to move legislators to restore voting rights to 40,000 by streamlining the process through which former felons regain their ability to vote.

We're also proud that the 2016 Election saw record-breaking usage of Maryland's Early Voting and Early Voting Same Day Registration pro-

grams. We look to build on these successes with legislation to allow same day registration on Election Day.

2016 was also a validation of some of our past efforts in election security and access. While the rest of the country began worrying about Russian interference in our elections, our paper trail ballot system allowed Marylanders to be assured that no such interference would impact our votes.

However, the introduction of those machines was coupled with jurisdictions reporting errors in the ballot scanning systems, leading to longer-than-necessary

waits and confusion. Additionally, many jurisdictions reported a lack of qualified Election Judges, who are vital to ensuring our elections run smoothly.

We are working with legislators to provide more incentives for election judges, while also allowing more people to serve.

We will also work with the legislature and the State Board of Elections to investigate mechanical issues that cropped up in the 2016 election to ensure that we fix them prior to our statewide elections in 2018.

In the news:

“By any measure, that makes this state's six-year experience with early voting an extraordinary success in at least one regard — it has made it easier to vote. There are other matters that ought to be studied as well — universal voter registration (that is, requiring a qualified person to opt-out rather than opt-in), expanding the pool of election judges and allowing Marylanders to take ballot selfies.”

- “Voting Early More Often”
(Baltimore Sun,
November, 2016)

**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!



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Howard County voters took a huge step forward for democracy in November, passing a ballot question to establish a Citizen's Election Fund and empower everyday donors in our elections. We are so grateful for the hard work of volunteers from across the county who turned out to events, talked with voters at the polls, and helped spread the word about this critical reform..

