

2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

As the Maryland General Assembly tries to balance protecting public health and doing ‘the people’s business,’ Common Cause Maryland will be working to ensure our Legislature remains committed to transparency and preserving public involvement. While Common Cause Maryland’s primary role will be protecting every Marylanders’ right to view and participate in the work of the General Assembly, the bills listed below reflect our priorities for the 90-day session.

Access to Voting

Marylanders voted in record numbers in 2020 because we were provided with increased access to voting, including the option to vote by mail from our homes or while incarcerated. We will be working to make some of these best practices a permanent staple in our elections.

Expand the Vote – While Maryland allows citizens with felony convictions to vote once they have been released from incarceration, many are not made aware of that right to vote. Eligible incarcerated voters who are pretrial or have been convicted of a misdemeanor also don’t have meaningful access to voting. We are continuing to partner with the Expand the Vote coalition to ensure these eligible voters have access to voting information and voting while in a correctional facility and upon release.

Improved Mail-In Voting – We will be working to make secure and accessible ballot drop boxes available in all elections. We will also be working improve the process for voting by mail, including: tracking that provides voters with real-time updates on the delivery and return of their ballots, a permanent list for voters who want their ballots automatically mailed, and an accessible process for curing ballots in the instances where a voter forgets to sign their return envelope.

Campaign Finance

With support for small donor public financing programs continuing to grow throughout the state, we are mobilizing Marylanders to help put pressure on our Legislature to begin reforming its own campaigns.

Citizen Funded Elections – We will be working to modernize the existing Fair Campaign Finance Fund as we prepare for upcoming gubernatorial elections, making it similar to programs at the local level. We will also be supporting efforts to allow Counties the opportunity to expand their programs to cover other local offices.

Redistricting Reform

This year, the Maryland Legislature will prepare to rearrange the boundaries of our Congressional and legislative districts. We need to ensure the lines drawn are fair and center input from Maryland communities.

Community Centered Maps – While we continue to support meaningful redistricting reform aimed at taming the gerrymander, we will be shifting our focus to ensure the process for drawing our maps is transparent, with ample public hearings and opportunity for comment and consideration of maps proposed by Maryland communities.

Transparency and Accountability

Access to government data and information is a fundamental pillar of an effective democracy. Too often, decisions or public records are kept behind closed doors. We continue in our role as a watch dog and resource on the issue.

Equitable Access to Public Records – While the state has taken important steps towards a more open and accessible government, our current Public Information Act (PIA) dispute-resolution process leaves many requesters questioning the overall fairness and efficiency of the program. We'll be working to move the process for requesting records towards greater equity – ensuring requesters who are unable to afford legal representation are provided with an alternative to resolving their disputes, ensuring more disputes involving fees and denials of fee waivers are able to be reviewed by the Board, and more.

Transparent Investigations into Police Misconduct – We've joined over 90 organizations in demanding impactful police reform in Maryland. One of these collective priorities includes improving the PIA which currently blocks access to information on how or if police misconduct is investigated. We'll be supporting efforts to remove complaint files from the personnel record category under the PIA to allow for the disclosure of all complaints of police misconduct. This increased transparency will provide an additional and vital layer of accountability to police actions in the state which will help to foster trust with Marylanders.

Other Initiatives

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.

