

February 7, 2022

## TESTIMONY ON RESOLUTION 1-22 COUNTY CHARTER – PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING SYSTEM

### Position: Favorable

Common Cause Maryland supports Resolution 1-22, which would amend Anne Arundel County’s charter to allow for the creation of a public campaign financing program for candidates for County Executive and Council.

Public campaign financing programs are important tools that lift the voices of regular Marylanders in the light of ever-increasing influence of wealthy interests on our politics. These programs work by incentivizing candidates to participate in a new system of fundraising, where large contributions and contributions from corporations and PACs are sworn off, while small-dollar donations from regular residents of Anne Arundel County are amplified so that even the smallest donation can have a huge impact. In order to qualify, candidates must receive a threshold amount of contributions from a threshold number of contributors. This process ensures that only candidates with viable community support can gain access to the public funding program, thus protecting public money.

Montgomery County, Howard County, Prince George’s County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County have all established similar programs, with Montgomery County successfully<sup>1</sup> using its program for the first time in 2018. The results in Montgomery County were incredibly heartening. Incumbent and first-time candidates from a diverse array of backgrounds used the program to run for office, raising money by meeting with constituents instead of reaching out to a cadre of wealthy individuals, corporations, and political PACs.

These programs also have bipartisan support. Governor Larry Hogan successfully used a similar program, the Fair Campaign Financing Fund, the first time he was elected. We also see both Democrats and Republicans opting in and qualifying in both Howard and Montgomery County this election cycle. This is also the case in other states: In Arizona, candidates from both parties use their Citizens Clean Elections program at almost equal rates.<sup>2</sup> Connecticut’s program helps Republicans compete more effectively<sup>3</sup> in a state that is heavily Democratic.

These programs remain popular amongst Marylanders for a simple reason: particularly since the *Citizens United* decision, they feel that our campaign system is disconnected from the populace, and that LLCs and wealthy individuals render regular Marylanders’ voices meaningless in the current campaign finance environment.

Ultimately, public campaign financing programs increase participation on both sides of the campaign – voters donate because they know that even a little bit can go a long way, and this donation is an investment that more tightly connects them to the campaign, raising interest. Candidates, freed from having to dial-for-dollars with

<sup>1</sup> <https://marylandp.org/reports/mdp/fair-elections-montgomery-county-0>

<sup>2</sup> <https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/01-25-21%20HR%201%20Bipartisan%20Memo%20330pm.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/01-25-21%20HR%201%20Bipartisan%20Memo%20330pm.pdf>

wealthy donors, spend more time among their constituents, getting a clearer picture of the problems facing regular Marylanders instead of just the wealthy few.

One of the most important aspects of public campaign financing programs is that, particularly when campaigns are getting vastly more expensive each cycle, they allow regular people to run on the power of their ideas instead of having to rely on wealthy interests.

A public campaign financing program in Anne Arundel County would allow residents with lower incomes a way to participate and have an impact on their elections that they are currently shut out from. Additionally, it would further incentivize candidates to reach out to the residents, as their small contributions could be matched for larger contributions, giving Anne Arundel's more marginalized residents a greater voice in the direction of the County.

**To be clear:** Resolution 1-22 does not put a public campaign financing program into place. Anne Arundel County's charter, like Baltimore County's before it, requires an amendment to allow for a separate fund from the general fund to create the program. This is necessary because candidates need to know that there is funding available to participate in a public campaign financing program and plan their campaigns around participation. Without a separate fund, candidates cannot do this. Resolution 1-22 would not create a program; it would amend the County charter to allow for this separate fund. Advocates, residents, and legislators would then work together to create a public campaign financing program that works for Anne Arundel County.

Common Cause Maryland supports Resolution 1-22 because it would lay the foundation for the creation of a public campaign financing program that could greatly amplify the voices of Anne Arundel County residents. We ask that you vote favorably on the legislation.

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