

2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

As we transition into a legislative session with an entirely new administration and General Assembly, Common Cause Maryland will continue advocating for reforms aimed at building a more equitable and inclusive democracy. Though many bills introduced this year aim to improve how our democracy functions, the bills below are our priorities for the 90-day session. These proposals will help ensure that all Marylanders can observe and meaningfully participate in the legislative process.

Access to Voting

In 2022, we implemented several reforms that allow voters to securely vote using the method most convenient for them – whether that means voting in a correctional facility, on campus, using a drop box, early, by mail, or in-person. This session, we'll build on those reforms using information collected by nonpartisan election protection volunteers and those tasked with running our secure, accessible, and fair elections.

Early Canvass of Mail-in Ballots – In 2021, we supported emergency legislation that aimed to ensure that our state and local election boards were prepared to meet the increased demand for mail-in voting. The Legislature passed this critical bill, but after Governor Hogan's eleventh-hour veto, the Board of Elections had to take legal action to minimize delays in election result reporting. This year, we support efforts to pass a permanent legislative solution to allow for the early processing of mail-in ballots. This will ensure timely results in future elections.

Equitable Pay for Election Judges & Protections for Election Workers – Each election cycle, our local Boards of Election experience issues recruiting and retaining an adequate number of trained Election Judges. Daily pay rates vary throughout the state and are sometimes inadequate, making it difficult for potential election workers to justify missing work. We'll be advocating for improved pay to help expand the pool of Election Judges in Maryland. We also support efforts to protect election workers against increased threats, harassment, and intimidation, including the publishing of personal information on the internet.

Redistricting

After the 2020-21 redistricting cycle ended with a preliminary injunction blocking the implementation of a racially discriminatory redistricting plan in Baltimore County, it is more apparent than ever that we need stronger protections against voting rights abuses. In response to this and similar issues that we observed in jurisdictions across the state, this legislative session we will advocate for long-term solutions through the passage of the Maryland Voting Rights Act. This legislation will help protect against election sabotage, stop partisan and racial gerrymandering, and ensure that voters can safely and freely cast their ballots. The Maryland Voting Rights Act will create a civil right of action against voter intimidation or obstruction, offer expanded resources for non-English speaking voters, and make addressing voter discrimination complaints a less costly and complicated affair.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency in government is critical to the health of our democracy. We will continue to hold the government accountable as a transparency watchdog. In addition to supporting the bill outlined below, we'll be working to ensure the public is able to observe and engage in the legislative process, whether at home or in Annapolis.

Virtual Court Access – Virtual court access allows the public to have safe, affordable, and meaningful opportunities to observe their legal system at work. With greater public access to court comes greater accountability. We continue to work in partnership with Courtwatch PG to ensure that the virtual access authorized by the Court of Appeals in 2021 remains permanent. Virtual court access will not replace in-person legal proceedings but will address many of the obstacles that prevent some Marylanders from coming to court. Virtual court access allows citizens to support defendants, victims, and witnesses in their proceedings.

Campaign Finance

Support for small donor public financing continues to grow in Maryland. In 2022, Montgomery County and Howard County made matching funds available to qualifying candidates for County Council and Executive. A gubernatorial candidate was also able to qualify for funding through the Fair Campaign Financing Fund. With nearly half of registered voters now residing in a jurisdiction with a public financing program, we encourage the General Assembly to begin reforming its own campaigns.

Expansion of Small Donor Public Financing Programs – Citizen-funded elections help to break down barriers to participating in our democracy and create a government that looks more like us — and works better for us. With programs like these in place, policies and laws are more responsive to public needs and less skewed by wealthy special interests. We continue to work with the Fair Elections Maryland coalition to establish a program for legislative candidates and to support efforts to expand these programs to cover other local races, like those for sheriff and school boards.

Disclosure & Transparency – The need for heightened transparency has never been more urgent. We'll be working to protect and strengthen our political spending disclosure laws so that every Marylander can see who is funding political efforts and trying to influence their votes.

Other Initiatives

Avert a Constitutional Crisis – Special interests continue to advance calls for Constitutional Conventions in the states. The call for a federal constitutional convention is a dangerous threat to our democracy. While Common Cause Maryland supports fighting big money in politics, we steadfastly oppose a constitutional convention. We continue to oppose those calling for Constitutional Conventions on any issue.

