

Maryland

Holding Power Accountable

2023 LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

This was a year of new beginnings in Annapolis: we inaugurated Wes Moore as Maryland’s 63rd Governor and welcomed an entirely new administration, as well as scores of new State Senators and Delegates within the General Assembly. This was also our staff’s first time back fully in-person during the legislative session, though we held legislative leadership accountable to keeping a hybrid option in place so the public could remotely participate in legislative proceedings throughout the full 90-days.

With your help, Common Cause Maryland was able to make significant progress on reforms across our issues areas, from campaign finance to voting rights. Learn more about our priorities below.

Passed Failed

Access to Voting

Better Pay for Election Judges - This legislation establishes the statutory minimum per diem pay for Election Judges at \$250 for each voting and early voting day. Currently, daily pay rates vary throughout the state, making it difficult for residents to justify missing work when their county pays inadequately. This new statutory minimum will help local boards recruit and retain Election Judges between election cycles. **HB 1200, SB 925 (Del. D. Jones, Sen. A. Washington)**

2024 Primary Election Date Change - This legislation alters the date of the statewide primary election and the primary election in Baltimore City, so they don’t conflict with the first day of Passover and Ramadan. The 2024 primary election will now be held on Tuesday, May 14. Early in-person and mail voting will still be available. **HB 410 (Del. Rosenberg)**

Risk-Limiting Audits - This legislation would allow our state and local election boards to use “the gold standard” for post-election ballot audits in an era when the integrity of our election systems face unprecedented domestic and international threats. Risk-limiting audits ensure that if and when vote counting machines fail, we have an automatic process to check on the software counts and correct them if they are wrong. **HB 572 (Del. Kaiser)**

Early Canvass of Mail-In Ballots – Reintroduced for the 2023 session after Governor Hogan’s eleventh-hour veto, this legislation establishes a clear curing process that ensures election officials are able to check for the presence of a signature and identify errors with a mail-in ballot that can then be fixed by the voter. This process, plus the language that allows for the pre-processing of mail-in ballots, will support our state and local boards of elections in releasing prompt and accurate results on Election Day. **HB 535, SB 379 (Del. Feldmark, Sen. Kagan)**

Fair Representation

Maryland Voting Rights Act of 2023 - This legislation would 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 an overall less costly and complicated affair. [Learn more.](#) **HB 1104, SB 878 (Del. Smith, Sen. Sydnor)**

Campaign Finance

Cryptocurrency Ban - This legislation would prohibit the use of cryptocurrency (such as Bitcoin, Ethereum, etc.) to make political campaign contributions or donations. The difficulty of tracing cryptocurrency donations raises serious questions about its potential to hide illegal campaign contributions from foreign sources. At a time when unprecedented amounts of money from anonymous sources are flooding into elections around the country, it is more important than ever that Marylanders know who is funding our elections — therefore trying to influence our views and our representatives. **HB 192, SB 269 (Del. Palakovich Carr, Sen. Rosapepe)**

Expansion to Additional Offices - These bills would allow the expansion of small dollar public campaign finance programs already functioning in many counties to other offices, including State’s Attorney, sheriff, register of wills, Judge of the Circuit Court, Judge of the Orphan’s Court, and elected members of the county Board of Education. Campaign finance programs lift up the voices of regular Marylander’s and empower those with community supported ideas who may not have connections to deep-pocketed interests. **HB 176, HB 213 (Del. Feldmark, Del. Watson et. al). Multiple County Delegations introduced similar legislation.**

Draft Committees and Exploratory Committees - This legislation would apply certain campaign finance requirements and prohibitions to draft committees and exploratory committees to ensure that everyday citizens are able to trace who is making donations and what special interests are being amplified in that process. Given the amount of money spent just testing the feasibility of an individual’s candidacy, we believe both draft and exploratory committees should be subject to the same level of scrutiny. **HB 441, SB 111 (Del. D. Jones et. all, Sen. Kagan)**

Transparency and Accountability

Open Meetings Act- State Ethics Commission - This legislation would significantly increase access to and efficiency of the State Ethics Commission by making them subject to enhanced requirements under the Open Meetings Act. Specifically, this would require that meeting agendas and materials be made available online in advance of meetings, that meetings be made publicly available by livestream, and that these streams and meeting materials are archived promptly after a meeting has adjourned. Coverage under the Open Meetings Act also puts a clear process in place for members of the public to report complaints and possible violations to the Open Meetings Law Compliance Board. **HB 58, SB 35 (Del. Korman, Sen. Kagan)**

Remote Court Access - This legislation would ensure that the virtual court access authorized by the Maryland Court of Appeals in 2021 remains permanent. This effort is being championed by our partners at Court Watch PG, a project of Life After Release, and will ensure virtual court access, allowing the public to have safe, affordable, and meaningful opportunities to observe their legal system at work. 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. [Learn more.](#) **HB 133, SB 43 (Del. Moon, Sen. Rosapepe)**

Board of Public Works Comment Act – This legislation would improve the transparency and accountability of the Board of Public Works by allowing public comments to be submitted electronically and requiring comments to be retained and made available to the public. The Board of Public Works oversees large state expenditures, funding for agencies, projects, and procurement contracts. This affirms the voice of the public as critical to Maryland’s highest administrative authority. **HB 498 (Del. Korman)**

Other Initiatives



Maryland Civic Excellence Program - This legislation would establish the Maryland Civic Excellence Program which recognizes public schools and students that promote civic engagement through a variety of programs, such as advanced placement government classes and after school activities. The Civic Excellence Program requires each participating public school system, beginning in the next school year, to award students with a Seal of Civic Excellence upon their graduation if they meet certain criteria outlined by the point system and categories in the bill. **SB 271 (Sen. Ready)**

Avert Dangerous Call for a Constitutional Convention – We averted calls for a constitutional convention, which would have placed every constitutional right and protection currently available to American citizens in jeopardy. **HJ2 (Del. Fisher)**

