



P.O. Box 278
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Committee: Ways and Means
Testimony on: HB 176 Local Public Campaign Financing – Expansion to Additional Offices
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 31, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 176. The bill will allow a county that is already using a system of optional public campaign financing for county executive and legislative offices to choose to expand that system to include the offices of state's attorney, sheriff, register of wills, judge of the Circuit Court, clerk of the Circuit Court, judge of the Orphans' Court, or an elected member of the county Board of Education.

Montgomery County used a system of optional public campaign financing for county executive and legislative offices in 2018 and 2022, and Howard County used a similar system in 2022. Prince George's County, Baltimore City, and Baltimore County are creating similar systems for future elections.

The Sierra Club and its members care about both the natural and human environments, including ending racial and social injustice. As a grassroots organization, we believe that the dominant force in electoral campaigns should not be money, but people and their aspirations for their communities. Unfortunately, this goal cannot become reality as long as potential candidates must either self-finance (which many simply cannot do) or rely on large contributors. Experience has demonstrated that offering a voluntary program that matches small campaign contributions enables people of more diverse backgrounds to become candidates.

Seeing candidates relying on large donors can lead to suspicion that they act on behalf of special interests or have hidden agendas, even when that is in fact not the case. Lessening the influence of money in elections will give voters increased confidence that candidates are sincere and will be impartial after election. Officials in law enforcement, the judicial system, and boards of education should be free from suspicion and this bill will allow counties to implement a system that will increase confidence in their fairness and impartiality.

Voting is the foundation of our democracy, and we believe it is essential to our democracy and to racial and social justice to make the ability to campaign for public office accessible to all qualified individuals regardless of background, personal wealth, or connections with moneyed interests.

We urge a favorable report on HB 176.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.