



**Testimony for the House Ways and Means Committee
February 6, 2018**

HB 227 - State Legislature Local Public Campaign Financing Act

JOANNA DIAMOND
ADVOCACY CONSULTANT

Support

The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland (ACLU) supports HB 227, which would expand the authority of the governing body of a county to establish a system of public campaign financing to include the office of a member of the General Assembly from legislative districts entirely within the county and from a multicounty legislative district.

Fair and free elections are essential to a free society. That value is especially important when ominous efforts are underway to undermine the electoral process and suppress voter participation nationwide. With the escalating costs of campaigns for public office, candidates may become increasingly reliant on the financial support of corporations and other major donors. Such contributions may have an undue influence or even outright corruption on a candidate's policies and priorities. Conversely, access to money, not political support or policy positions, may determine who runs for office and who is elected. Many candidates fail simply because they cannot attract the funds needed to finance a viable campaign.

Public financing of campaign activity is a promising way to facilitate the opportunity for political participation. The increasing cost of campaigns for public office tends to restrict the breadth and freedom of political expression in America. The loss deprives the public of the full range of public debate. Public financing would provide a substantial remedy for this problem and would advance a number of positive free speech values. It would facilitate candidacy and significantly broaden the spectrum of campaign debate.

Public financing would also make public officials more accountable to voters in general and less beholden to the often-narrow economic interests of a few big contributors. Further, it would allow public officials to do their jobs instead of raising money.

Although free speech principles require opposition to some limitations on expenditures and contributions, the current system of private campaign financing causes disparities in the ability of different groups and individuals to communicate their views about politics and government. Such imbalances tend to frustrate the goal of full political participation by all citizens and raise concerns about the greater influence that some individuals and groups have on political processes. The appropriate civil liberties response is to expand, not limit, the resources available for political advocacy.

The ACLU of Maryland urges the Committee to favorably report HB 227.

AMERICAN CIVIL
LIBERTIES UNION
OF MARYLAND

MAIN OFFICE
& MAILING ADDRESS
3600 CLIPPER MILL ROAD
SUITE 350
BALTIMORE, MD 21211
T/410-889-8555
or 240-274-5295
F/410-366-7838

WWW.ACLU-MD.ORG

COLEMAN BAZELON
PRESIDENT

SUSAN GOERING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANDREW FREEMAN
GENERAL COUNSEL