



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961... The Voice of the People of Howard County

CB6-2022: Addressing Technical Error in Citizens' Election Fund (CEF) Law

01/18/2022

The Howard County Citizens Association is supportive of this legislation and would like to thank Councilmember David Yungmann for introducing it. We understand Councilmembers Deb Jung and Liz Walsh have expressed support and we are waiting on Councilmembers Opel Jones and Christiana Rigby as well as County Executive Calvin Ball to do the same. We ask that this bill is passed as an emergency legislation to be enacted right away.

Frankly, we are confused by the hand-wringing. This is a common-sense fix. The entire law contemplates primary candidates receiving campaign funds. It is completely unrealistic to expect candidates declare and file for office a full seven months before the primary deadline and consider this bill an appropriate fix to address this technical glitch.

We also consider this bill to fall squarely in the category of an emergency legislation. This law was enacted thanks to the efforts of Howard County residents who worked tirelessly to collect signatures for a charter amendment vote, because they wanted to eliminate special interest developer influence from county government. Now all that effort is under threat of being wasted due to a technicality. If the erosion of trust in government and the preservation of the very concept of "government for the people by the people" is not an emergency, I don't know what is. As Councilmember Rigby stated in her 2017 testimony in support of the law: "we are facing a crisis where regular citizens doubt if our systems, government, and elected officials are really working for us."

Furthermore, if the CEF program fails it will not deliver on an important aspect of the goal of the program as described by Councilmember Rigby

who in 2017 also said, “This program will encourage people who are passionate and interested in public service but are shut out of traditional wealth networks to run for office on the strength of their ideas and commitment to the community.” Those shut out of traditional wealth networks are typically people of color and women. A vote against this bill is a vote to continue their exclusion in favor of a corrupt system that erodes trust in government.

Councilmember Rigby has stated that voting for this bill while benefiting from it as a conflict of interest. We disagree. First, we disagree with the basic premise that this benefits a single candidate. This is a democracy bill and addressing a technicality that facilitates an action that is directly contemplated by the law does not fall in the category of conflict of interest. It is entirely inconsistent to worry about a conflict of interest and benefiting yourself for taking action on fixing a technical error after entering the program to benefit yourself, so to the extent that the concern you raised is valid it existed long before the error was discovered. Also, only one candidate qualifies for this program after being certified. The other candidate who has signed up has not been certified by the State, which is what indicates qualification.

We urge you to vote for this bill by first declaring it as an emergency legislation save the CEF program.

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