



June 26, 2018

By Electronic Mail ([mayor@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:mayor@baltimorecity.gov))

The Honorable Catherine Pugh  
Office of the Mayor  
250 City Hall, 100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: Fair Election Fund Charter Amendment

Dear Mayor Pugh,

On behalf of the Campaign Legal Center (CLC), I write to respectfully urge you to support the Fair Election Fund charter amendment, Council Bill 18-0229, which would allow for the creation of a small-dollar public financing program in the City of Baltimore. CLC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to implement and defend effective campaign finance, lobbying and ethics laws. Our work promotes every voter's right to participate in our democratic process and to know the true sources of money spent to influence elections.

A report released this week provides more evidence that voters are concerned with the role of money in politics and its effect on our democracy.<sup>1</sup> Multimillion dollar contributions from individuals to super PACs and other political entities have left many Americans feeling excluded from the democratic process. Public funding offers an alternative. Public funding can elevate the voices of all citizens in the political process, not just those who can write large checks. Although there are many important and effective reforms the city may wish to consider, CLC believes that public funding is a particularly promising option. Public funding programs can reorient our elections by facilitating dialogue between voters and elected officials and increasing participation in the electoral process.

The charter amendment would be an important first step toward creating a small-dollar public financing system in Baltimore. Once the amendment is approved by the Council and voters, the Council will need to pass a bill creating the program. Your support is critical to this effort and we hope you will endorse this important reform.

Cities across the country have opted for small-dollar public financing as an alternative to the status quo of privately-financed campaigns. New York City's successful program has increased the number of residents—and new donors—giving in city elections. In 2017, Seattle completed its first election under its new program.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Democracy Project: Reversing a Crisis of Confidence](http://www.democracyprojectreport.org/report) is a report by the George W. Bush Institute, Freedom House and the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement, available at [www.democracyprojectreport.org/report](http://www.democracyprojectreport.org/report).

Early studies show that the 2017 donor base in Seattle was younger, more racially and socio-economically diverse, and included more women than in previous elections.<sup>2</sup>

Closer to home, Montgomery County is in the midst of its first election with public financing as an option for candidates. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of candidates running for office as more people are able to mount viable campaigns with public funds. Additionally, Howard County and Washington, D.C. recently created public financing programs. These examples, and many more, demonstrate the potential impact of these programs and the overwhelming public support for an alternative to our current campaign finance system.

A small-dollar public financing system in Baltimore would give candidates an incentive to reach out to small-dollar contributors and help engage more local residents in the democratic process. Amending the city's charter is an important first step and CLC strongly urges you to support this amendment. We would be happy to answer any questions you might have about the various programs mentioned in this letter or public financing in general.

Sincerely,

/s/

Catherine Hinckley Kelley  
Director of Policy & State Programs

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<sup>2</sup> [Expanding Participation in Municipal Elections](http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/EthicsElections/DemocracyVoucher/UW_Seattle_Voucher_Final.pdf) is report by Jennifer Heerwig and Brian McCabe, published by the University of Washington, available at [www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/EthicsElections/DemocracyVoucher/UW\\_Seattle\\_Voucher\\_Final.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/EthicsElections/DemocracyVoucher/UW_Seattle_Voucher_Final.pdf)