

**Testimony on Baltimore City's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget
Public Hearing, May 16
Urge \$1 million in Support for Fair Election Fund**

Common Cause Maryland urges the Baltimore City Council to ensure the Fair Election Fund (FEF) is funded in the FY25 budget. **We agree with the Baltimore City FEF Commission's pending recommendation which we expect will be for nearly a million dollars and further recommend that the Council allocate a full \$1 million in this year's budget to ensure that the program is adequately funded for the remainder of the 2024 election cycle.**

In November 2018, we overwhelmingly voted in support of Question H, an amendment to the city charter to create the Fair Election Fund and its Commission. The passage of CB-403 created Maryland's fourth county-level fair elections program. At the time of its passage, City residents and advocates cheered the bold step the Council made in the name of fair elections and open democracy. We are grateful for the work that this Council has done over the last few years to keep the program on track to be fully funded.

The Baltimore City FEF Commission – an independent, bipartisan commission made up of residents of the city – is preparing to issue a budget recommendation. We anticipate a recommendation that at least \$840,000 be set aside to guarantee the first use of the FEF is a success.

We fully agree with the Commission's funding recommendations and believe that an investment of \$1 million will ensure adequate funding for all participating candidates.

If adequate funds are not available for the November 2024 general election, the State's Director of Campaign Finance will have to mandate a pro rata reduction in the amounts that will be matched. Having to reduce the funds available to candidates would jeopardize public trust in the program, the willingness of candidates to seek public funding in future elections, and the reputation of the Fair Election Fund itself.

An investment in fair elections is an investment in our democracy. Please invest in fair elections and ensure that our public funding program is allotted the funds necessary to succeed.