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April 1, 2016

Councilmember Nancy Navarro, Chair
Government Operations and Fiscal Policy Committee
Stella Werner Council Office Building
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850
(Via e-mail)

Re: Montgomery County's Public Election Fund

Dear Councilmember Navarro:

The Brennan Center respectfully recommends that the Government Operations Committee adequately fund Montgomery County's Public Election Fund. The Brennan Center strongly supports public campaign financing, which has a proven record of success in amplifying the voices of ordinary citizens. Public financing allows candidates with broad support in the community to run competitive campaigns without having to seek support from a few wealthy contributors or special interest groups.¹

When the County Council unanimously passed Bill 16-14, it created an independent and bipartisan Committee to Recommend Funding for the Public Election Fund.² The Committee has recommended that the Fund be provided with \$10 million by May of 2017. We urge the Government Operations Committee to meet that goal.

Montgomery County's public financing program has the power to increase participation in elections and expand opportunities for more candidates to run.³ But the program

¹ ADAM SKAGGS & FRED WERTHEIMER, EMPOWERING SMALL DONORS IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS 14-15 (2012), <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/empowering-small-donors-federal-elections>.

² Bill 16-14 § 2 (adding Montgomery County Code Ch. 16, Art. IV, § 16-27).

³ See Memo from Robert H. Drummer & Josh Hamlin to County Council dated Sept. 26, 2014, http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/bill/2014/Packets/20140930_6B.pdf.

cannot accomplish these goals if candidates do not participate.⁴ And of course candidates will not participate if the program lacks adequate and reliable funding.⁵

As the Committee to Recommend Funding noted, a new program must gain acceptance among candidates and the public. Candidates are unlikely to make the effort to qualify, especially when the process is new and unfamiliar, if they aren't confident that the available public funding will be enough.⁶ Furthermore, if the Fund has more money than it needs in the first cycle, the surplus can be used for future elections.

Successful public financing systems offer candidates the option to fund their campaigns through small donations from everyday constituents. Instead of separately seeking money from wealthy donors and votes from the general public, candidates can depend on small donations that the vast majority of their constituents can afford.⁷ In New York City, where almost all candidates participate in the program, campaigns rely on matched small donations for around two-thirds of their funds; large donors and special interests are far less important.⁸ A well-funded program in Montgomery County can empower candidates to fuel their campaigns with grassroots support from the everyday people they represent.

Sincerely,



Ian Vandewalker
Counsel

⁴ MICHAEL J. MALBIN, CAMPAIGN FINANCE INSTITUTE, CITIZEN FUNDING FOR ELECTIONS 10 (2015), http://www.cfinst.org/pdf/books-reports/CFI_CitizenFundingforElections.pdf.

⁵ Skaggs & Wertheimer, *supra*, at 22.

⁶ MICHAEL G. MILLER, SUBSIDIZING DEMOCRACY: HOW PUBLIC FUNDING CHANGES ELECTIONS AND HOW IT CAN WORK IN THE FUTURE (2014) 32-35.

⁷ ANGELA MIGALLY & SUSAN LISS, SMALL DONOR MATCHING FUNDS: THE NYC ELECTION EXPERIENCE 18 (2010), <https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/small-donor-matching-funds-nyc-election-experience>.

⁸ Malbin, *supra*, at 21.