

Testimony in Favor of HB 533

March 14, 2001

House Committee on Commerce and Government Matters

Councilmember Phil Andrews

Representing the Montgomery County Council

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Councilmember Phil Andrews, and I am here today on behalf of the Montgomery County Council to urge that this Committee give HB 533 a favorable report.

As elected officials, I am sure that you would agree that we should do all that we can to improve public confidence in government and the electoral process. The General Assembly has recognized this by approving various election law reforms in the past decade, such as limiting the amount that a political action committee can contribute to a state or county candidate during an election cycle.

HB 533 provides you with another opportunity to demonstrate support for campaign finance reform. This measure, sponsored by Del. Cheryl Kagan, would empower county officials to enact campaign finance law that is consistent with local needs — so long as the changes are at least as strict as State law and not inconsistent with State law.

The Montgomery County Council supports HB 533 with some recommended changes. The Council recommends that the General Assembly clarify that any changes that county officials might approve would only apply to county elections. That is the intent of the sponsor and the understanding of the Montgomery County Council. The Council also suggests that the term *campaign finance* may need to be defined in the Bill.

As you are aware, counties in Maryland vary greatly in population and in the cost of media markets. The number of people in council or commissioner districts varies greatly as well, sometimes within the same county. Therefore, contribution limits that may be appropriate in one county or for certain county offices may not be appropriate in another county or for different offices within the same county. HB 533 would provide county officials with the opportunity to craft campaign finance measures that are responsive to the particular needs of their county. HB 533 is not a mandate, however. It simply would authorize county officials to make changes in this area of law.

HB 533 is a very important bill, because it would provide county officials with the tool we need to respond to our many constituents who support campaign finance reform. Municipal officials, except in Baltimore City, already have the authority to act in this area.

The Montgomery County Council urges a favorable report of HB 533. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

