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Good evening,

I am very sorry that this is so late to get to you. I have attached a copy of my written testimony on CB 46 - 2024. I am testifying on behalf of the Citizens' Election Fund Commission in favor of the bill.

Thank you.
Sue Geckle
Chair, CEF Commission.

Sue Geckle on behalf of the Citizens' Election Fund (CEF) Commission

Citizens' Election Fund
3430 Court House Dr
Ellicott City, MD 21043

Good evening. My name is Sue Geckle, and I am the Chair of the Citizens' Election Fund (CEF) Commission. I am speaking tonight on behalf of the Commission. I want to thank Council Chair Jung and the rest of the Council for allowing me to provide testimony tonight in favor of passing CB46. I also would like to thank Council Members Jung, Rigby and Walsh for co-sponsoring CB 46.

I do want to start with the background of how the Citizens' Election Fund (CEF) came to be. In November 2016, the voters of Howard County approved an amendment to the County Charter requiring the County Council to create a Citizens' Election Fund system for candidates for County Council and County Executive. Section 907 of the Howard County Charter required that a Citizens' Election Fund System be adopted. The Howard County Council stated that the goal and intent of establishing the program was to encourage greater voter participation in County elections, increase opportunities for more residents to run for office, and reduce the influence of large contributions from wealthy individuals, corporations, businesses, political action groups, and other large organizations.

A bill to establish a voluntary Citizens' Election Fund system was enacted in July 2017. The CEF Commission first met in May 2019 and was responsible for overseeing the 2022 election which was the first Howard County election where candidates could use public funds provided through the CEF system.

The CEF Commission is committed to the public funding of elections for the reasons stated by the County Council in 2017 as well as for the added transparency that public funding provides. All donors and the amount of each donation is available for the public to see. Candidates using the fund are not able to take donations from PAC that might have donors that are not identified.

After the 2022 election the Commission invited all the candidates that used the fund to attend the December Commission meeting. All five CEF candidates (or a representative) attended. All the candidates whether Republican or Democrat expressed positive experiences with using the fund and stated that they would consider using it if they ran again. As there always is with new endeavors, there were some things that did not work as well as they could or were cumbersome for candidates to navigate. The Commission was extremely grateful to each candidate for being so forthcoming with their feedback.

The Commission met three times in 2023 and at each meeting we discussed possible amendments to recommend to the Council for adoption. We had multiple conversations with the State Board of Elections as well as receiving input from Howard County citizens. After all these discussions the Commission's representatives from the Office of Law, Kriste n Perry and Amanda Mihill, provided possible language for the amendments which the Commission unanimously approved. I presented the recommendations at a work session to the County Council in January 2024 which form the basis of this legislation.

The Commission strongly recommends that the Council approve CB 46. We feel that these amendments make the fund fairer to CEF candidates by allowing a small portion of funds to be retained in CEF accounts for use as long as the candidate is committed to using the fund in the next election, by allowing in-kind donations to be made by local and state

Central Committees, for candidates in uncontested primary elections to receive a portion of their funds, and for candidate in uncontested primary elections but with a contested general election to receive funds earlier.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify on behalf of the Commission in favor of CB 46.