

**Howard County Citizens' Election Fund Commission  
3430 Courthouse Drive  
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043**

**OPEN MEETING MINUTES**

A duly advertised public meeting of the Howard County Citizens' Election Fund Commission was held virtually via WebEx on December 6, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

**Commission Members ("Commission") Present:**

- Suzanne Geckle
- Douglas Miller
- Ralph Frith
- Keith Ohlinger
- Nadine Bernard
- Jennifer Bevan-Dangle

**Staff Members Present:**

- **Angela Moore**, Deputy Director, Department of Finance, assigned to assist the Commission pursuant to Code Section 10.310 (h).
- **Brenna Punte-Pinos**, Chief – Bureau of Water/Sewer & Misc. Revenue, Department of Finance
- **Melanie Bishop**, Chief – Bureau of Tax and Specialty Services, Department of Finance
- **Kristen Perry**, Deputy County Solicitor, Howard County Office of Law
- **Amanda Mihill**, Senior Assistant County Solicitor, Howard County Office of Law
- **Andrew Galarza**, Budget Analyst, Office of Budget

**Citizens Joining Open Meeting:**

- Joel Hurewitz

As the Chair of the Commission, Ms. Geckle called the open meeting to order at approximately 6:03 p.m.

1. Administrative Items

- o Ms. Bernard motioned to approve the minutes from the October 11, 2023, meeting. Mr. Frith seconded the motion. There was a unanimous vote to approve the minutes.
- o Ms. Geckle confirmed that the date of the next meeting will be scheduled for June 18, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at the George Howard Building.

2. Citizens' Election Fund ("CEF") Audit

- o Ms. Geckle provided a verbal estimate of an audit of the CEF account that is expected to be between \$8,000 - \$10,000. She reminded everyone to keep this figure in mind when determining the budget request.

### 3. Budget Recommendation

- The Commission discussed the budget needed for the election to be held in 2026 and estimated funds would be necessary for eight County Council candidates and three County Executive candidates, for a total of \$3,328,810.
- Ms. Moore reminded the Commission of the current CEF balance of \$1,419,623.
- After further discussion with the Commission, Mr. Ohlinger moved to approve a request of \$640,000 for each year FY2025-27. Ms. Bevan-Dangle and Mr. Frith seconded the motion. There was a unanimous vote to approve the budget request of \$640,000 for each year FY2025-27.

### 4. Discussion of recommendations for possible amendments to the CEF

- The Commission reviewed proposed recommendations/changes to the CEF law.
- The proposed recommendations/changes to the following sections of the CEF were discussed:
  - §§10.306(a)(2), Distribution of public contributions;
  - §§10.305(b)(2), Citizens' Election Fund established;
  - §§10.306(h)(1)(2)(3), Distribution of public contribution;
  - §§10.304(a)(b)(c), State Board determination;
  - §§10.300(s)(1)(2), Definitions;
  - §§10.309(A)(1)(B), Applicant and participating candidate restrictions;
- Motion to pass the recommendations listed above was made by Mr. Ohlinger and seconded by Mr. Frith. There was a unanimous vote to approve and send the recommendations to the County Council.
- After some discussion regarding recommendations to creating a provision regarding uncontested elections and distribution of public contributions, Mr. Ohlinger motioned to create language that allows a candidate to receive 1/3 matching funds if running uncontested in the primary, but to receive the full amount if contested for either election by the filing deadline. Ms. Bernard seconded, and all were in favor of the recommendation.
- Office of Law agreed to draft proposed language for receiving funds in an uncontested election. This will be sent to the Commission for approval via email, so all recommendations can go to the Council at the same time.
- Mr. Hurewitz attended the meeting and questioned the Commission regarding the email he sent with suggested amendments to the CEF law.
- Ms. Geckle stated that with the exception of 2 minor amendments – adding language to §10.309(A) to include a “Certified Candidate,” and deleting part of the wording from subsection 5 and instead referring to what is permitted in §10.302(B)(2) – the Commission would need more time to review the suggested amendments, as the email had been received the day before the meeting – the Commission agreed.

### 5. Discussion of state level bills to allow for public financing of additional offices

- Senator Clarence K. Lam's bill regarding including Board of Education candidates to utilize the CEF, as was Delegate Jessica Feldmark's bill, was discussed, which would allow, based on certain criteria, all state offices to use

Howard County's CEF – this was understood to include the offices of Sheriff, States Attorney, Clerk of the Court, Register of Wills, and all state delegates and state senator races.

- Ms. Geckle added that she believed that Delegate Feldmark's bill was in the drafting stages, and Senator Lam's bill is posted on the Howard County website,

6. Adjournment:

Upon motion by Mr. Miller and seconded by Mr. Frith, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the open meeting at approximately 7:11 p.m.