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The color of money

The debate over whether there should be public financing of campaigns for seats in the General Assembly has often neglected one of the more glaring problems with the current system - the lack of participation by African-Americans.

A survey by Progressive Maryland found that people living in predominantly black communities give about 5 1/2 times less in political donations than state residents in general. In other words, they have little clout in the corridors of power. By diminishing the need for such donations, public financing would help address a glaring inequity.

If, as many believe, the likelihood of public financing being approved this year turns on the Senate's actions, Baltimore will find a familiar face in the middle of the debate - Sen. Joan Carter Conway, chairwoman of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee.

Campaign finance is historically a thorny issue for lawmakers, but Senator Conway's support could prove instrumental in passing a genuine reform effort this year.

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