

## Poll shows voters favor state campaign finance reform

*Believe corporate donations influence decisions in Annapolis*

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Supporters of public financing of state legislative campaigns said Wednesday that a poll shows voters believe corporate donations sway decisions in Annapolis and campaign finance reform is needed.

The poll, released Wednesday morning, was paid for by Progressive Maryland Education Fund and Common Cause Maryland. Both groups support ending corporate donations to candidates for public office in Maryland and laws that provide public money to finance political campaigns.

"Public faith is eroding exactly at the time we need it to stay intact the most," said Ryan O'Donnell, executive director of Common Cause Maryland.

The poll shows a public perception "of undue influence by special interest groups" when it comes to state politics, said Jon Cardin, a Democrat who represents the 11th District, including Owings Mills, Pikesville and part of Timonium.

Cardin has been the lead sponsor on similar bills in previous years.

The telephone poll, conducted by Gonzales Research and Marketing Strategies, surveyed 833 registered voters across the state.

Supporters of publicly financed state legislative campaigns say the results show that voters are concerned that corporate campaign contributions influence votes in Annapolis.

More than half of those who responded said major changes in how campaigns are financed is needed. Nearly 30 percent said minor changes are needed. Only 5 percent said no changes were needed, according to the poll.

Public financing for General Assembly races almost became a reality until a Senate Bill similar to one sponsored by Cardin failed in the Senate.

That bill would have created a \$14.3 million fund for General Assembly races. About \$5 million would have come from a similar fund that is available to candidates for governor who wish to take advantage of publicly financed campaigns.

An additional \$9 million would have come from abandoned property revenues and a \$5 state income tax check-off payed for by state tax payers.

O'Donnell said the bill ultimately failed "due to a surprise amendment offered by an opponent. That left the legislation, in our minds, on the 1-yard line," O'Donnell said.

Candidates could then voluntarily participate in a publicly funded campaign but in return would have to agree to abide by a sliding scale of spending limits. The limits would be based on what office the candidate ran for and whether the race was a contested.

Currently, the state operates a public financing fund for gubernatorial candidates. Participating candidates must agree to spending limits to be eligible for money from the fund. Limits are based on the population of the state at the time.

The limit for the 2006 election was \$2.1 million. Despite the failure of bills creating General Assembly public financing, Cardin said the poll gives reason for hope that supporters of public financing of political campaigns will achieve their goal.