

FAIR ELECTION FUND COMMISSION

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September 9, 2024

Dear County Executive Alsobrooks:

The Fair Election Fund Commission has a crucial responsibility: ensuring that Prince George's County's first Fair Election Fund is fully operational for the 2026 county elections. The Public Campaign Financing legislation, passed by the Council in 2018 and amended by a 10-1 vote in 2023, makes this obligation clear. Given the significant funding shortfall to date, including the absence of an appropriation in the adopted FY 2025 budget, we respectfully request a supplemental budget appropriation of \$2 million for FY 2025 to ensure a successful program in 2026.

Immediate action is imperative. Appropriations made this year and in the forthcoming FY 2026 budget represent the only opportunities to allocate appropriate funding for the 2026 elections. It is important to note that substantial public support is required for candidates to qualify for this matching fund program: a minimum of 150 contributions totaling \$7,500 for a District Council candidate, with even higher thresholds for At-Large Council and County Executive candidates. Therefore, candidates considering participation under the program's strict limits must be assured of the program's viability well before the FY 2026 budget is adopted next May.

This supplemental appropriation will confirm to candidates and the public that the program is real and viable. Additionally, by July 1, 2025, the County's Director of Finance must assess the adequacy of the Fund for the 2026 elections and lower disbursement levels if necessary. Underfunding qualifying campaigns would severely penalize publicly financed candidates and undermine the program. This is why we are requesting \$2 million now, with an additional \$1.25 million in your next budget.

Our recommendation for the minimum funding necessary for the 2026 election cycle—\$3.65 million, to be appropriated across these two budgets—was detailed in our letter of January 25, 2024. This recommendation is grounded in fiscal analyses from two County agencies: the Office of Audits and

Fair Election Fund Commission

c/o Office of Finance, Prince George's County Government
1301 McCormick Drive, Suite 1100, Largo, MD 20774

<https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/boards-commissions/fair-election-fund-commission>

Investigations in October 2018 and the Council's Budget and Policy Analysis division in November 2023.

Both analyses identified \$3.65 million as the minimum amount needed for the 2026 primary and general elections, based on the assumption that two candidates would opt in and qualify for a full public match in the executive race and each of the eleven council races.

We recognize the serious budget challenges the County faces. We also note that funding for the recent unexpected special election—costing more than this request—had to be found, as will funding for additional special election(s) this fiscal year. Just as funding elections, whether planned or unexpected, is a necessary cost in a democracy, so too is funding important initiatives to advance fundamental democratic principles such as this.

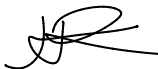
At a time when principles of democracy and voting rights are under assault across the country, we are committed to working with you to advance this important program for campaign finance reform and to deliver it fully, fairly and on time to county residents as promised six years ago. To that end let's remember and lift up its mission:

“Prince George’s County’s Fair Election Fund is a public campaign financing program established to promote and encourage broader access to elected office in the County and prevent large donations from unduly influencing government. The program is intended to empower citizens to run for office based on the strength of their ideas, supported by small donations from ordinary people and matching funds from the Fair Election Fund.”

As always, we are available to meet with you and your staff to discuss this request, which was unanimously approved by the Fair Election Commission at our last meeting. Please let us know if this request is likely to be acted upon and the steps in the process of enactment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,



Mrs. J.M. Parker, Chair
Fair Elections Fund Commission

cc: Stanley A. Earley, Director
Office of Management and Budget