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**For more information contact:**

Sean Dobson, Progressive Md. Educ. Fund

## **News Release**

### **Progressive Md. Educ. Fund, Common Cause, Lawmakers Release New Polling Data on Attitude of Marylanders About Campaign Finance in State Politics**

***Poll shows voters believe big campaign contributions  
have “corrupting” influence on lawmakers in  
Annapolis***

***As solution, voters overwhelmingly support voluntary,  
public funding of campaigns***

**Silver Spring.** The Progressive Maryland Education Fund (PMEF), Common Cause Maryland, and campaign finance leaders in the Maryland General Assembly today released the results of a major statewide poll conducted by Gonzales Research & Marketing Strategies on the attitudes of Marylanders about campaign finance in state politics.

“This poll shows once again that Marylanders overwhelmingly believe our state’s campaign finance system gives deep-pocket special interests like BGE undue influence over the lawmaking process and, even more troubling, that big campaign contributions have a corrupting influence on lawmakers. That’s the bad news,” said Sean Dobson, Executive Director of PMEF. “The good news is that there are proven reforms already law in other states that Maryland can adopt to restore voter confidence in representative government, such as voluntary public funding of campaigns (which poll respondents overwhelmingly support) and also banning corporate campaign contributions.”

PMEF is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that monitors and reports on issues of concern to working families. Common Cause Maryland (CCMD) is our state’s pre-eminent watchdog group monitoring ethics in government. Senators Paul Pinsky and Jamie Raskin and Del. Jon Cardin, who spoke at the press conference, are leaders for campaign finance reform in the General Assembly.

In the 2009 legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly, advocates for campaign finance reform came closer than ever before to enacting voluntary, public funding of General Assembly campaigns. The Senate President supported the bill and advocates counted enough votes to win in both chambers. But on the Senate floor, opposed lawmakers succeeded in attaching poison pill amendments to the legislation, which resulted in the bill being sent back to committee to languish.

During the 2009 session, opposed lawmakers advanced two main arguments against the reform bill. In private, they said, "I take campaign contributions from lots of special interests groups, but it does not sway my vote, so where is the problem?" In public, a number of opposed lawmakers pretended to support the concept of public funding of campaigns, but claimed the state government's budget deficit rules out new expenditures of any kind at this time.

"We at PMEF talk to thousands of Marylanders every year, so we strongly suspected that most Marylanders disagree with both these anti-reform arguments," said Matthew Weinstein, PMEF's Baltimore Region Director. "But to be sure, we decided to poll-test attitudes of Maryland registered voters on these subjects by commissioning a public opinion poll with Gonzales Research & Marketing Strategies, which was completed in September."

The results of the poll show that Maryland voters strongly disagree with the first argument advanced by opponents of reform – namely, that campaign contributions create no undue influence on lawmakers. Instead, Marylanders believe by a 4:1 margin that "lawmakers in Annapolis are more likely to vote the way their political contributors want them to vote, not how their constituents want them to vote." Indeed, by a depressing 67-11 spread, Maryland voters agree that "big campaign contributions have a corrupting influence on state lawmakers in Annapolis."

Maryland voters believe the problem of undue influence is not just abstract, but indeed creates specific bad results that hurt the public. For example, by a huge 69-11 spread, Marylanders agree that, "Large campaign contributions from Constellation Energy, BGE, Pepco and big electric utilities are maintaining policies that drive up electricity costs in Maryland."

"Gouging of ratepayers will be a red-hot election issue in 2010," said Rion Dennis, Political Director of Progressive Maryland. "Any incumbent with a brain should support campaign finance reform because voters clearly perceive a connection between our broken campaign finance system and skyrocketing electricity rates."

The poll not only shows that voters perceive a big problem of undue influence. It also shows they favor by a lopsided 70 to 15 margin a specific solution: voluntary, public funding of campaigns as practiced in Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut. Indeed, the poll shows that Maryland voters favor this solution so strongly that they overwhelmingly

reject the second main argument advanced by opponents of reform during the 2009 legislative session, namely that the current budget deficit should rule out new public expenditures of any kind. 70 percent of voters agree and only 17 percent disagree with the following statement: “The recession has helped create a budget deficit for the Maryland state government. Do you agree or disagree that enacting a campaign finance reform law like the one I just described is still important to do even though such a system would use public funding?”

Poll respondents’ views about the problem of undue influence and the solution were pronounced and remained strong regardless of party affiliation, region, race, or sex.

“Last year, with the help of Senate President Mike Miller, we got our reform bill down to the five yard line,” said Dobson of PMEF. “This year, in the election year, we will push the ball into the end zone because lawmakers will hear from voters loud and clear that the General Assembly needs to restore voter confidence in government by removing the corrosive appearance that lawmakers listen more to big campaign contributors than to regular citizens.”

The poll and news release can be viewed at [www.Pmef.Org](http://www.Pmef.Org)

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