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Campaign Finance Legislation Limpers through the General Assembly, but Reform still Stands a Chance

Only 7 of 24 proposed pieces of legislation are still up for debate in this year's General Assembly session.

RICHMOND, Va. — This year, the Virginia General Assembly was poised to finally enact sweeping campaign finance reforms that advocates had championed for decades. Virginia was coming off of the most expensive election in state history and has some of the most relaxed campaign finance laws in the country. Many hoped that a politically divided legislature would finally be able to address these long-recognized issues.

In response, a near record number of campaign finance-related bills were introduced. They would have addressed many issues, including contribution limits, the personal use of campaign funds, enhanced disclosure requirements, and increased oversight and monitoring. Unfortunately, as of yesterday's "cross-over", only seven bills remain. Despite the demise of many popular pieces of legislation, advocates hold out hope that the General Assembly will at least pass the remaining seven bills and respond to decades-long calls for reform. The seven remaining bills would begin to address concerns that Virginians have raised for many years and provide a solid foundation for eventual comprehensive campaign finance reform.

The seven bills still 'alive' would restrict the personal use of campaign funds ([SB463](#)), strengthen existing campaign finance disclosure provisions ([HB86](#), [SB222](#), and [SB318](#)), enhance the oversight authority of the State Board of Elections ([HB492](#)), and extend the mandate of the joint legislative study subcommittee on campaign finance reform ([HJ53](#)). If passed, these bills would not create radical changes in Virginia's existing campaign finance laws, but would begin to address some of the issues where Virginia falls far behind the rest of the country in transparency and government accountability. These bills come directly from and reflect the exhaustive work of a tax-payer funded, bicameral, bipartisan Legislative Joint Committee on Campaign Finance Reform which identified key entry points for campaign finance reform and recommended next steps after meeting from August to October 2021.

We know that people care about this issue. Recent [polling](#) by the Wason Center shows that nearly 80 percent of Virginians, irrespective of party, feel that the influence of large donors needs to be curtailed, while 88 percent support comprehensive disclosure requirements. It's

worth noting that 75 percent of Virginians also want campaign contribution limits, but all 8 bills to address these concerns were swiftly killed in the first four weeks of session.

Although it is not everything advocates had hoped for, the passage of these seven bills would still mark significant progress for Virginia on this issue. Decades have gone by with little to no campaign finance reform, but advocates hope that 2022 will be different and call on legislators to respond to citizens' calls for better governance in the Commonwealth.

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