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Virginia General Assembly Defeats Most Campaign Finance Reform Bills *Just four of 24 bills introduced passed during the 2022 legislative session.*

RICHMOND, Va. — The General Assembly killed 20 of the 24 campaign finance reform bills introduced during the 2022 legislative session. Among the defeated bills include attempts to restrict the personal use of campaign funds, place limits on campaign contributions, improve disclosure from dark money groups, and ban contributions from public utilities. Awaiting a signature from Governor Youngkin are two bills pertaining to disclosure, an oversight bill which strengthens the Department of Elections ability to monitor and enforce campaign finance regulations and a resolution extending a study of campaign finance reform in Virginia.

The General Assembly convened just weeks after [polling by the Wason Center for Civic Leadership at Christopher Newport University](#) showed a majority of Virginians support implementing campaign finance reform. An overwhelming 78% of Virginians support reducing money from big campaign donors, and 88% of Virginians support public disclosure of contributions, the poll revealed. Virginia held its most expensive election in history last year, with a record amount of money — \$7 million — contributed by undisclosed donors.

Legislators from both sides of the aisle introduced bills to address the concerns of Virginians. Bills sponsored by Republicans and Democrats in the House and the Senate, including Republican Del. Lee Ware and Republican Senator Richard Stuart, would have prohibited campaigns from accepting contributions from public utilities. Because members of the General Assembly shape the laws public utilities operate under, contributions from these entities can lead to what many perceive as a conflict of interest. The bill failed to pass out of the House Privileges and Elections committee where 13 of the 24 introduced campaign finance reform bills were killed.

Democratic Sen. John Bell sponsored a bill, along with Delegates Marcus Simon (D) and Mike Cherry (R), to prevent candidates for state office from using campaign contributions for personal use. A similar bill unanimously passed the House last year before being defeated in the Senate. This year, the bill passed through the Senate while encountering stiff resistance in the House

Privileges and Elections committee along party lines, leaving Virginia as one of a handful of states with no law prohibiting the personal use of campaign funds.

Bills capping contributions, implemented in 45 other states, continue to be elusive. Four bipartisan bills which would cap contributions from individuals were introduced in this General Assembly, two in the House of Delegates and two in the Senate. The two bills in the Senate would have set limits at \$20,000-25,000 per candidate in each election cycle. The caps of these bills were nearly seven times higher than the federal limits of \$2,900 per individual to federal candidates. Introduced by Democratic Senators Chap Petersen and Joe Morrissey, the bills died immediately with similar bills in the House killed during their first hearing.

Of the four campaign finance reform bills that did pass, two relate to campaign finance disclosure. HB 125, sponsored by Republican Del. Glenn Davis, establishes a fine of up to \$25,000 for sponsors violating campaign advertisement disclosure laws. HB 86, sponsored by Republican Del. Tim Anderson, directs the Department of Elections to create a searchable online database containing information about campaign finance reports, is still in play because of delays in finalizing the state budget. Unfortunately, 8 other disclosure bills, some of which would have strengthened reporting by dark money groups, died in committee.

A bill requiring campaigns to keep certain records that may be subject to review by the Department of Elections passed nearly unanimously. However, it has a delayed implementation date of 2024, allowing legislators to get through the next election cycle without any oversight. Finally, a resolution extending a study of campaign finance reform in Virginia by a joint subcommittee passed without any dissent.

Citizens of the Commonwealth should be disappointed. After the most expensive election in Virginia history and, 30 years after the [Governor Wilder Ethics Commission report](#) recommended campaign finance reform, 2022 should have been the year for bipartisan wins for reform and good governance laws. Good governance advocates, Heidi Drauschak, Executive Director of VAOurWay and Nancy Morgan, coordinator of the VA Chapter of American Promise, expressed their disappointment that many common sense campaign finance bills never made it out of committee. They highlighted though that the continuation of the work of the Joint Legislative Subcommittee hopefully means that comprehensive reform will be implemented in Virginia, just not in 2022.

Interested in learning more about which bills passed and which didn't? You can review all the bills [here](#) or attend our "Roundtable on the Status of Virginia Good Governance Legislation: A Post Mortem" which will be held on Wednesday, March 23rd at 7 pm. Register [here](#).

[VAOurWay](#) and the [VA Chapter of American Promise](#) are both non-partisan groups which champion good governance and transparency in Virginia, while promoting increased public discourse between citizens of the Commonwealth and their legislators. Follow us on Twitter: [@MoneyOutVA](#) and [@our_va](#)

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