



The League of Women Voters
Berkeley • Albany • Emeryville

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Tuesday, September 15, 2015

Mayor Bates and City Council
By email and hand
Re: Public Financing of Elections proposal
Item 60 on Agenda for Sept 15, 2015

Dear Mayor Bates and Members of the City Council

We urge you to support the Public Financing Ordinance before you and to place it on the November 2016 ballot. A public financing ordinance should create a fair playing field for all candidates. A candidate should not need to be wealthy or have wealthy friends to run successfully. This measure would be voluntary and optional; candidates could continue to follow the existing rules.

Public financing should enable people running for election and those who are elected to give their full attention to meeting citizens, learning about their concerns and making good decisions on public policies rather than to raising money. Public financing should enable people who have been active and effective in the community and are known by fellow citizens to have good ideas and an ability to turn their good ideas into good realities, to run effectively and competitively. Candidates should only need to get an appropriate number of fellow citizens to give small contributions.

Recent Supreme Court decisions make it impossible for any proposal to permit candidates to run in Berkeley without raising some funds initially and throughout their campaigns. The proposed measure would reduce the funds that could be raised from any individual donor from the current \$250 to no more than \$50. A six to one public match would increase their funds and provide enough money to run a campaign. The proposal limits contributions to \$10 to \$50 from each donor and permits candidates to begin to get public matching funds 6 times larger than the amount they raise after they have raised a minimum of \$300 in contributions of \$10 to \$50 each.

The ballooning amount of dark money in elections nationwide is destroying public respect for elected officials. Although Berkeley's current limit of \$250 on individual contributions to candidates and its reporting and enforcement system are excellent, we can do better. Berkeley's high standards of public service make Berkeley a good place to renew the effort for public financing of elections. Berkeley could promote a new state and national campaign to keep big money and dark money out of elections. We could help defeat the very damaging effect of recent Supreme Court decisions on public trust in government and elected officials.

The League strongly favors public funding of elections. Our national League position on campaign finance stresses that public funding combats corruption and undue influence, enables candidates to compete more equitably for public office and promotes citizen participation in the political process. The League's campaign finance reform strategy has two tracks: 1) achieve incremental reforms where possible in the short term, and 2) build support for public financing as the best long-term solution.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Bickel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy Bickel, President
president@lwvbae.org