



CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 19, 2007 Public Hearing

Submitted By Christine S. Horrigan, Government Director

Comments On:

HB 7386 AAC The Conveyance of Certain Parcels of State Land
And Campaign Finance Reform

My name is Christine S. Horrigan. I am Director of Government Issues for the League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a statewide organization with over 2400 members. On behalf of the League, I would like to thank you for giving the League an opportunity to comment on certain provisions dealing with campaign finance reform contained in HB 7386.

The League is a long time supporter of campaign finance reform, including public financing of campaigns. Our goals for campaign finance reform include reducing the role of special interest money, leveling the playing field, and encouraging candidates to run for office and to re-connect with ordinary citizens.

The League was proud to be part of the effort that resulted in passage of sweeping campaign finance reforms in 2005, including voluntary public financing of campaigns. Today, with these historic reforms on the legislative books, our focus has moved to the implementation of the laws. However, our objectives have not changed. While we are mindful of the need for efficiency, bureaucratic ease and protection of the public fisc, we believe that these considerations must be carefully weighed against the goals of the campaign finance reforms adopted in 2005. Accordingly, we find that we can support some, but not all of the changes, contained in HB 7386.

Specifically, the League supports mandatory electronic filing (Section 13) in order to promote transparency and prompt disclosure. We also support amending the deadlines for candidates filing intent to abide or not to abide by expenditure limits (Section 14) and requiring the use of contribution cards (Section 16).

However, we oppose requiring individuals making qualifying contributions to be registered voters (Section 15). Voting is but one means of participating in the political process. There are many other ways of participating including attending political rallies

or speeches, signing petitions, writing letters to legislators and contributing to political candidates. Indeed, it is not uncommon for our young citizens to be involved in activities like these prior to reaching eligible voting age. Naturally, the League hopes that anyone who engages in these activities will also register and vote. However, we do not believe that voting is the sole means of civic engagement, particularly in an age where money increasingly replaces time and the courts have ruled that political contributions are a form of protected speech and association. In addition, the registered voter requirement would place an undue burden on candidates who are new to the process—and who may inspire someone who is not registered to contribute, perhaps as a prelude to later registering and voting—and would encourage established legislators to focus even more closely on their bases and parties. We believe that the system should encourage candidates to reach out to all citizens, regardless of whether they are registered to vote. The rationale for this requirement—“to facilitate candidate fundraising, candidate compliance and Commission determinations”¹ —is not sufficiently compelling to override the need to engage ordinary citizens and to encourage candidate participation in the public financing system.

Similarly, the League opposes limiting qualifying contributions solely to contributions collected by a candidate committee. Currently, the law allows contributions received by exploratory committees to be considered in calculating the aggregate contribution required to qualify for public financing. See C.G.S. §9-704(a). Section 15 (f) of HB 7386 says that no qualifying contributions shall be accepted by exploratory committees for any office listed in subsection (a). Although the language is very confusing, we read this section to mean that candidates would not be allowed to collect qualifying contributions during the exploratory committee stage. This runs counter to the goal of encouraging candidates to run for office and will place an unreasonable burden on candidates, particularly those candidates just entering the political process who may wish to “test the waters” through an exploratory committee before fully committing to a campaign. The change may also impact established public officials who wish to consider a run for a different political office and may discourage candidates from participating in public financing. For these reasons, the League opposes this change.

The League of The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates this Committee’s continued hard work and dedication to the cause of campaign finance reform. We appreciate the opportunity to be heard on these matters and look forward to working with you to make sure that the long-awaited reforms become reality. Thank you.

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¹ See *Testimony of Beth A. Rotman, Director of Public Campaign Financing, State Elections Enforcement Commission before the Government Administration and Elections Committee, March 9, 2007*