



CGA Government Administration And Elections Committee
February 25, 2008 Public Hearing

Submitted By Christine S. Horrigan, Government Director

Support For:

SB 333 AAC Comprehensive Ethics Reforms

SB 336 AAC Transparency in Government

HB 5505 AAC The Citizens' Election Program

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My name is Christine Horrigan. I am Government Director for the League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a statewide organization with over 2300 members dedicated to improving the electoral process and encouraging the active participation of citizens in government. On behalf of the League, I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment upon a number of bills currently before the committee.

SB 333 AAC Comprehensive Ethics Reforms

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut believes that the public should have confidence in the integrity of its government and further, that government officials and employees should be held accountable for carrying out their duties in both an effective and ethically responsible manner. Consistent with this position, we support having a process in place such as the establishment of a bi-partisan legislative ethics committee and a legislative code of conduct that allows the legislature to discipline members whose actions call into question the integrity of the legislative body. In addition, we support giving judicial authorities the option of pension revocation as a means of holding public officials and employees accountable.

SB 336 AAC Transparency in Government

The League wholeheartedly supports continued improvement in the organization and procedures of the General Assembly to provide an orderly flow of legislation with full and open consideration by the public, committees and on the floor of the General Assembly. Strike-all amendments have the potential for radically changing a proposed bill. For example, during the 2007 legislative session, a strike-all amendment was used to transform bill 1015 "AAC Restoration of a Swimming Pool in Manchester's Landmark Historic District" into a bill that would ban the use of artificial trans fats in Connecticut's

restaurants. In this case and many others, strike-all amendments actually represent “new” bills.

Under Section 2-26 of the Connecticut General Statutes, bills must be on the desk of members at least 2 legislative days prior to passage, unless the president of the Senate and the speaker of the House certify that an immediate vote is necessary. SB 336 amends C.G.S. §2-26 to include strike-all amendments. The League believes extending the 2 day requirement to strike-all amendments will help ensure that legislators and the general public have the opportunity to fairly consider and submit input on the substance of any strike-all amendment before it is brought to a vote.

To further increase transparency in General Assembly deliberations, the League also urges the committee to propose legislation that would require a public hearing whenever a bill or amendment creates an exception to an existing law, unless the legislature dispenses with this requirement by a 2/3 vote.

HB 5505 AAC The Citizens’ Election Program

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. Today, with these historic reforms on the legislative books, our focus has moved to the implementation of the laws. While we believe that the fundamentals of the public financing program are sound, we support “tweaks” to the system to make the program more efficient, effective and user friendly.

Specifically, the League supports expanding the powers of the State Elections Enforcement Commission to allow it to issue cease and desist orders and conduct spot checks to ensure that grant money is being spent properly (Section 1), restoring the ban on lobbyists’ solicitation of “ad book” purchases (Section 10), reducing the thresholds for mandatory electronic filing in order to promote transparency and compliance (Section 16), and extending from 3 to 4 days the time in which the SEEC can act on an application for funds under the program and creating other scheduling efficiencies (Section 18). In order to ensure that participating candidates have access to the necessary funds in a timely manner, the League also supports providing supplemental grants when a nonparticipating opponent receives contributions that exceed the applicable spending limit for a participating candidate, eliminating the escrow requirement and allowing candidates to spend supplemental grant money in statutorily defined increments, rather than on a dollar-for-dollar match with non-participating candidates (Sections 19 and 20) .

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the GAE Committee’s continued hard work and dedication to the causes of ethics and campaign finance reform. We thank you for the opportunity to be heard and look forward to working with you to make sure that these reforms become reality.