



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

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*Testimony Presented Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee*

*March 13, 2009*

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*House Bill 5366 - Reduction of Grants Under the Citizens' Election Program*

*Senate Bill 604 - Reduction of Certain General Election Grants Under the Citizens' Election Program*

*Senate Bill 1109 - Reduction of General Election and Primary Grants Under the Citizens' Election Program*

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The State Elections Enforcement Commission opposes **House Bill 5366** and **Senate Bill 1109**.

Both of these measures would reduce the grants that a qualified candidate would receive under the Citizens' Election Program. House Bill 5366 impacts only the general election grant for candidates for the General Assembly while the Senate Bill 1109 reduces the grants for all covered offices for the election and primary.

We are convinced that the reduction in grant levels will compel candidates to forgo participation in the program, and thus rely on big donor and special interest PAC funds. It will force candidates to return to the old broken system which the Governor and General Assembly rejected in the landmark legislation enacted in 2005. We achieved 75% participation rate in the 2008 General Assembly election cycle; the highest rate for any public campaign financing program's inaugural run. We expect that all statewide candidates will seek to qualify for grant funds in 2010, and that there will be an increase of 10% or an 85% participation rate for General Assembly candidates in 2010 but only if we maintain the current grant levels. The current grant levels were arrived after considering data for prior campaigns and were intended to ensure that candidates are attracted to participate in the CEP. Lowering grant levels will only serve to protect incumbents; as challengers require more funds to combat established name recognition and other incumbent advantages. Lowering grant levels will lessen political opportunity that I know that some of you on this very committee would not have had but for the current construct of the CEP. In these dire economic times, people need to have the utmost confidence that their elected officials are serving the public interest, and are accountable to them, and not unduly influenced by wealthy contributors and PACs.

I have submitted a plan to the Appropriations Committee that will save \$15 million in the next biennium, while retaining the current structure of the CEP. The Commission recognizes its need to be part of the solution to the fiscal problems we all face, and it was in that spirit that we came to the table with this proposal. It was in that spirit, that we agreed to a reduction of 13.5 million from the CEF in this fiscal year. All of my mangers took unpaid furlough days as the Governor requested, and I have cut spending significantly at the SEEC. We will continue to do our part. But please, do not go down this road as we will end up eradicating the most significant governmental reform legislation that has been passed in the past three decades.

The Commission provides the following information concerning **Senate Bill 604**. This bill would impact participating candidates and create vulnerability in that they could potentially face a nonparticipating candidate who is well endowed either through personal wealth or successful fundraising. The Commission has reviewed the 2008 primary elections and found that overall candidates faced competitive races in the primary as well as in the general election. The Commission agrees to monitor this concern during the 2010 elections and to propose changes if it becomes necessary.

Thank you for your consideration of the Commission's views on these bills.

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