



CGA Appropriations Committee

**STATE AGENCY BUDGET PRESENTATIONS
AND PUBLIC HEARINGS**

STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

FEBRUARY 10, 2009

Comments Submitted By Christine S. Horrigan, Government Director

My name is Christine Horrigan. I am Government Director for the League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a statewide organization with over 2100 members dedicated to improving the electoral process. On behalf of the League, I would like to thank you for giving the League the opportunity to comment upon the portion of the Governor's Recommended Budget as it relates to the State Elections Enforcement Commission.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut was proud to support the campaign finance reform law passed in 2005. Today, the Governor's Recommended Budget places those reforms—and in particular, public financing of campaigns—in jeopardy. Specifically, we oppose the Governor's proposal to cut \$24 million from the Citizens' Election Fund over the next two years, her proposal to repeal Connecticut General Statute Section 9-7c, and her proposal to consolidate all funding for the SEEC in the Citizens' Election Fund.

The League strongly opposes any further cuts to the Citizens' Election Fund. The Governor's budget mitigation package in November 2008 cut \$5 million from the Fund; the January 2009 deficit package stripped another \$7.5 million. The League believes that any further cuts, particularly of the magnitude being recommended by the Governor (\$24 million over two years), will seriously jeopardize the viability of the Citizens' Election Program. According to the SEEC, the net effect of the Governor's proposal is that the Citizens' Elections Fund will receive "minus appropriations" in fiscal year 2010 and 2011. The SEEC expects to have approximately \$43 million in the Fund at the end of fiscal year 2009 against an anticipated cost to run the program in 2010 of \$52 million. Clearly, that is not a sustainable situation. Equally important, candidates will not sign up for public financing if they feel that the money won't be there, thereby defeating the purpose of the program.

The League also opposes the repeal of Connecticut General Statute Section 9-7c. This law was passed in 2004 to protect the SEEC from retaliation after Governor Rowland, under investigation by the SEEC and the State Ethics Commission, attempted unsuccessfully to

consolidate those agencies under the guise of saving money. Repeal of this law would allow the Governor to reduce the SEEC's budget without legislative approval (another concern for candidates seeking public financing) and to ignore the SEEC's budget request and substitute her own. The SEEC plays a vital role in our democracy by ensuring fair elections and must be protected from political retribution. The Citizens' Election Fund must also be protected against future "raids" without legislative approval. The League urges you to say "No" to repealing the important safeguards contained in Section 9-7c.

Finally, we note that the Governor's proposal consolidates the funding for the SEEC into the Citizens' Election Fund and would require the SEEC to pay for fringe benefits for its entire staff out of the Fund. It is our understanding that no other agency is required to pay staff fringe benefits from funds budgeted to the agency. While we don't pretend to be budget experts, we would note that the SEEC's mission encompasses more than just the Citizens' Election Program and that it does not make sense (at least to us) to roll all of its funding into that Program. We ask that you take a close look at the Governor's proposal and take appropriate steps to ensure that both the SEEC and the Citizens' Election Program are adequately and appropriately funded.

With 75% of candidates who ran for office in 2008 participating in the program, we know that public financing of campaigns works. As one of our good government colleagues recently put it, "democracy and accountability are too important to be sacrificed—even during economic hard times." In 2005, Connecticut enacted sweeping campaign finance reforms designed to restore the faith of its people in government. The League encourages you to stand firmly behind those reforms, to reject any further cuts to the Citizens' Election Fund and to ensure that the SEEC is appropriately funded and protected from political retaliation.

Thank you.