



CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 13, 2009 Public Hearing

Comments Submitted By Christine S. Horrigan, Government Director

**Support For:**

SB 1107 AAC Electronic Filing of Campaign Reports

SB 6662 AAC Certain Revisions to the Citizens' Election Program

SB 1108 AAC The Powers and Duties of the State Elections Enforcement Commission  
and the Voter's Bill of Rights

**Opposition to:**

HB 5366 AAC The Reduction of Grants Under the Citizens' Elections Program

SB 604 AAC The Reduction of Certain General Election Grants  
Under the Citizens' Election Program

SB 1109 AAC The Reduction of General Election and Primary Grants  
Under 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 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 bills that are before the Committee today.

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 shifted to making sure that the Citizens' Election Program "works for" the people of Connecticut and that it meets the goals of 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.

**SB 1107 AAC Electronic Filing of Campaign Reports**

The League strongly supports lowering the thresholds and expanding the universe for mandatory electronic filing of campaign reports. Mandatory electronic filing promotes transparency in government and prompt disclosure. It is also more efficient, reduces paper and saves money-- important considerations in these difficult times.

**HB 6662 AAC Certain Revisions to the Citizens' Election Program**

The League also supports the revisions to the Citizens' Election Program contained in HB 6662. Conceptually, the League supports providing matching grants for independent expenditures that are intended to

promote the success of the opponent of a participating candidate (Section 10). We believe that eliminating this loophole in the current law is important to leveling the playing field; however, we recognize that some individuals may be concerned about the timing of this change given the state's economic condition. We also support capping organization expenditures in general election races for Governor and other statewide offices (Section 11), another loophole under the current law, and believe that the amount of the caps contained in the bill are reasonable under the circumstances. To prevent giving one candidate an unfair advantage over others, we also favor prohibiting organization expenditures by party committees in primary races for Governor and other statewide offices (Section 11). Finally, as a matter of separation of powers, we support prohibiting legislative caucus committees and legislative leadership committees from making organization expenditures to benefit any candidate running for Governor or other constitutional office (Section 11).

**SB 1108 AAC The Powers and Duties of the State Elections Enforcement Commission and the Voter's Bill of Rights**

The League also supports expanding the investigatory and enforcement powers of the State Elections Enforcement Commission as outlined in SB 1108. One of the most disappointing aspects of the rollout of the new voting technology has been the lack of consistency exhibited across the state. We believe that this lack of consistency has been exacerbated by the inability of the State Elections Enforcement Commission to enforce the Secretary of the State's regulations, which has resulted in a cavalier approach to election law processes on the part of some election workers.

The League strongly supports giving the SEEC the power to enforce the Secretary of the State's regulations. Because the right to vote is our most precious right, we also support making violations of the "Voter's Bill of Rights" subject to penalty. Finally, to ensure the smooth working of the Citizens' Election Program, we support monetary fines for the failure to file a candidate intent affidavit in a timely manner.

**HB 5366, SB 604 and SB 1109 – Acts Concerning the Reduction of Grants Under the Citizens' Election Program**

The League strongly opposes these three bills which would reduce the amount of the grants available under the Citizens' Election Program. It is imperative that grant amounts be set at a level that is high enough to both attract candidates to the program and to allow challengers to run competitive campaigns against incumbents. The League believes that one of the reasons that Connecticut's rollout of public financing was so successful in 2008 was that the grant amounts were set at levels that allowed candidates to run viable campaigns. Lowering those grant amounts would help incumbents (who already have an advantage) and hurt challengers. This, in turn, would lead to decreased participation, threatening the viability of the program and defeating its essential purposes—reducing corruption, leveling the playing field and encouraging candidates to run regardless of their personal circumstances.

Following the 2008 general election, approximately \$1.4 million in unused grant money was returned to the program, representing a significant cost savings. Rather than legislatively reduce the amount of the grants, the League believes that legislators should work diligently to run their campaigns in an efficient and effective manner that will allow them to return some of their grant money to the Citizens' Election Fund, thereby setting an example for others.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut appreciates the opportunity to comment on these bills and looks forward to working with you on these matters.

Thank you.