



**Testimony of Cheri Quickmire
Before the Appropriations Committee
On the Governor's Deficit Mitigation Package
March 11, 2010**

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Cheri Quickmire and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is one of the organizations who worked to urge the General Assembly and the Governor to pass the Citizens' Election Program (CEP) in 2005, as well as important fixes to that law in 2006 and 2007.

Common Cause in Connecticut is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has more than 400,000 members around the country and 36 state chapters. We have approximately 7500 members and activists in Connecticut.

I appreciate the hard work of the Appropriations committee and the General Assembly as you seek to deal with the financial challenges that we face in Connecticut today. I am here tonight to say that, despite a dour economic outlook, **our state is not too broke to be clean.**

The inaugural year of the CEP was a tremendous success. A success watched around the country. Because of your hard work and the work of your colleagues the Citizens' Election Program is a model for good government reform in the nation. 73 percent of all candidates in 2008 ran under the Citizens' Election Program. 78 percent of those elected to serve in the 2009-2010 General Assembly are Citizens' Elections officials. 97 percent of all contributions in the 2008 election came from individuals and 102 women ran for seats in the General Assembly, the largest number of female candidates in a decade.

We strongly oppose the Governor's proposal to cut an additional \$12 million from the Citizens' Election Fund. Additional cuts will Cripple Citizens' Election Program
Over the past 14 months the CEP has been cut by \$39 million. Any additional cuts make it challenging to have the funds we need to run a robust program in 2010 and it calls into question whether we have the resources to run a program in 2012.
The statewide and legislative races in 2014 will be all but impossible to fund with the

resources that could be accrued by then. Common Cause urges you to reject any proposals to cut the Citizens' Election Program.

There has been some talk in the General Assembly that it would be acceptable to sweep the entire contents of the Citizens' Election Fund because the Fund will quickly re-generate when the escheats money is deposited from the Office of the State Treasurer. Unfortunately, it is extremely unlikely that the entire \$11 million that is anticipated to be deposited to the Fund in FY 11 will all arrive at once. According to the OST and the State Elections Enforcement Commission, the money comes in small chunks, generally between \$2million and \$4million. It could take the entire year for the entire allotment to be credited. Funds need to be available for candidates while they are running for office.

On January 1st the SEEC reported on the sufficiency of the Citizens' Election Fund. (Projected Levels of Candidate Participation and Public Grant Distribution for the 2010 Citizens' Election Program & The Sufficiency of the Citizens' Election Program December 28, 2009). The report is available on the SEEC website. Projecting various scenarios – looking at past election trends and what is known now about the 2010 elections at the time of the report – they estimate expectations on the fund for the coming election. They also estimate that the 2010 election cycle could cost between \$38 and \$48 million. We believe the cost will be on the high end of that range.

If we do not have enough money to run the program in 2010, then the SEEC will need to prorate grant amounts and candidates can raise large amounts of money from private sources, which completely undermines the Program's goals. In addition, we would have negative balances in 2010 and 2011, it will be very difficult to make up the ground we need to run legislative races in 2012 and impossible to make up the difference 2014.

As a reminder, the following acts have swept the Citizens' Election Fund:

- Public Act 08-1 the General Assembly transferred \$5,000,000 from the CEF
- Public Act 09-1 the General Assembly transferred \$7,500,000 from the CEF
- Public Act 09-2 the General Assembly transferred \$1,500,000 from the CEF
- Public Act 09-3 the General Assembly transferred \$25,000,000 from the CEF,

\$18,000,000 was transferred mid November 2009 and an additional sweep of \$7,000,000 will be made in FY 11.

At this point I am skeptical that we would be left with a full allotment in 2012 but if the CEF did receive a full allotment, the fund would have \$10.3 million for grants for legislative races in 2012 – *when a budget passes in the spring of 2012.* **This will be extremely destabilizing to candidates and they may choose to forgo participation in the program because they won't know if it will have any revenue – let alone sufficient revenue for the program.** I am not sure whether \$10 million will be enough

money to cover all races in 2012. Experience in other states that have public financing shows that participation increases over the years that a program is in effect.

If full allotments are available for 2013 and 2014, with the same kind of costs listed above, \$20 million would be available for statewide and General Assembly races in 2014. That will not adequately fund this important program. We understand that Connecticut faces a budget crisis. We also understand that every program needs to be reviewed and that cuts and pain must be shared. The Citizens' Election program has already been cut by \$39 million over the past fourteen months. We believe further cuts will discourage participation in the program and ultimately are dangerous to the program

We applaud the efforts of the Appropriations committee and leadership to hold firm on protecting this important good government reform. This landmark program brought Connecticut a long way from "Corrupticut" and we cannot go back.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening.