

CHARLOTTE KOSKOFF 8 RIVER EDGE COURT PLAINVILLE, CONNECTICUT

Chairperson Slossberg, Chairman Spallone, Ranking Members Senator McLachlan and Representative Hetherington, and distinguished Committee members, my name is Charlotte Koskoff and I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on Sec. 10 of Raised Bill No. 5428, which repeals Sec. 9-717 of the General Statutes. I do not represent any organization or group but speak as an individual citizen who believes in the critical importance of preserving Connecticut's landmark campaign finance reform. I also speak from the perspective of having run for public office in a district with a large voter base and having had real-world fund-raising experience as a candidate.

I applaud the GAE Committee's continuing focus on repeal of Sec. 9-717, the reversion clause of the Citizen's Election Program. The testimony of Atty. Beth Rotman at the February 22 public hearing made clear the urgency of repealing this clause. It would be a travesty for campaign finance reform, which took so long to create and has so much potential for significant, positive change, to be demolished by a time bomb that can be so easily defused. Repeal must be a priority. The clock is ticking.

It is clear that the Citizens Election Program can be both a powerful deterrent to corruption in government and a significant force for strengthening the electoral system. Once the program's continued existence is assured by repeal of Sec. 9-717, changes can be made to the CEP to make it comport with court rulings and to refine it in the light of experience.

Because special interest sponsorships and personal wealth are the only alternatives to public funding for the Governor's race and other statewide races, my discussion will focus on those races. This should not be construed as a lack of support for public funding for legislative races. The need for legislative races funded by clean elections money is also strong. But the absence of any practical alternatives to either special interest dominance or personal wealth to fund statewide races makes it absolutely essential to preserve a voluntary public funding option for those races. (It is important to note that special interests are not confined to lobbyist and PAC donations but can also be present in individual contributions.)

With regard to public funding for statewide races, the constitutional infirmities that Judge Underhill cited, even if upheld on appeal, do not affect the underlying strength of the CEP's public funding model. Reducing the percentages required for the qualifying petitions for the minor party candidates, or even eliminating them altogether, would not compromise the goals or operation of the system.

Similarly, the loss of the trigger mechanism, while very unfortunate, is also not fatal. However helpful the trigger might have been, it was a limited remedy which would have been of modest effect against an opponent with the ability and willingness to spend unlimited sums. Some of the strategies proposed as alternatives to a trigger are arguably as effective as a trigger would have been.

statewide races, we are back to special interest domination of the election process and special interest influence on government. The Citizens Election Program must be kept alive to provide regular citizens access to the electoral process, both to strengthen democracy and to deter corruption.

The Citizens Election Program is worth saving and should be saved.
I urge the repeal of the reversion clause, Sec. 9-717 of the General Statutes, on a priority basis.

Thank you.
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