



CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 19, 2012 Public Hearing
Comments On RB 5528 "AAC Changes to the Public Financing Act and
Other Election Laws"
Submitted By Cheryl Dunson, President

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a nonpartisan, nationwide organization with over 1800 statewide Connecticut members dedicated to improving the electoral process. On behalf of the League, I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment upon RB 5528 *AAC Changes to the Public Financing Act and Other Election Laws*. As a result of the out-of-town absence of our Campaign Finance Specialist Christine Horrigan, I offer the following preliminary comments on RB 5528 on behalf the League. We hope that the committee will consider any further comments provided by Ms. Horrigan in the future.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut has strongly supported campaign finance efforts with the following goals in mind: ensuring the public's right to know, combating corruption and undue influence, encouraging candidates to run for public office and re-connecting with citizens. We actively worked for passage of the historic 2005 Campaign Finance Reform law and the subsequent "fixes" in response to court rulings. We also were strong proponents of the 2010 law "AAC Independent Expenditures" that included "stand by your ad" provisions and expanded language on what constitutes "coordination."

In an age where the cost of running for office has exploded, the courts have recognized that making a contribution is a form of protected speech, and the subsequent emergence of well-funded groups about which little is known who seek to influence elections, more can be done in the public interest.

We support the proposed expanded disclosure provisions. This bill requires corporate or organizational entities to disclose all sources of the contributions for campaign-related activities. If any funds are transferred from another entity for the purpose of a campaign related expenditure that would also have to be specifically disclosed. Particularly noteworthy is the provision to require corporations incorporated or registered to do business in the state that wish to engage in election related spending to propose annually a political activities budget and to present such budget to shareholders for adoption (Sec. 29); in other words, this provision gives the shareholders the knowledge and the power to authorize or vote down spending relating to Connecticut's elections.

The League also supports: mandatory electronic filing by lobbyists of any election-related expenditure (Sec10); expansion of the “stand by your ad” provision to require identification of a website link which will provide the names and addresses of donors (Sec20); and a requirement for television broadcasters to provide a searchable database of elections-related ads with key information such as the contact info for the purchaser of the ad, the date and amount of expenditure and whether it was made in support or opposition to a targeted candidate or ballot measure (Sec 20).

Taken together, the League believes that these provisions will increase the public’s knowledge of who is spending how much to influence the outcome of our state’s elections and help instill confidence in our electoral system.

In contrast to our support for the disclosure provision, the League is concerned about the across-the-board doubling or near doubling of contribution limits to the Citizens’ Election Program (Sec 13-17) that appears to be in a response to the court’s ruling eliminating “trigger funds”. Another provision which also appears to be in response to the court ruling is to enable participating candidates to raise unlimited amounts in response to a nonparticipating opponent whose spending approaches the limit or exceeds the eligible grant amount. We fear that these provisions will once again create an opportunity for undue influence.

As proposed, some of the changes to individual limits are:

Individual contributions	Current limits	Proposed limits
To State Central Committee	\$ 5,000	\$10,000
To Gubernatorial Candidates	\$ 3,500	\$ 5,000
To Statewide Offices	\$ 2,000	\$ 4,000
Per Election	\$15,000	\$30,000

Changes to the limits on contributions by political committees organized by businesses or organizations include:

Political Committee Contributions	Current Limits	Proposed Limits
To Gubernatorial Candidates	\$5,000	\$10,000
To Statewide Offices	\$3,000	\$ 6,000
To Senate Candidates	\$1,500	\$ 3,000
To State Central Committee	\$7,500	\$15,000

We oppose these proposals because we believe that they will once again augment the importance of wealthy contributors at the expense of more numerous but smaller donors. We urge the committee to consider ways in which small donor contributions could be magnified, for example, by allowing candidates to raise matches to small donor contributions to supplement the grant.

Finally, we would like to bring to the committee's attention that:

- in the provision (Sec 28) that requires lobbyists to report expenditures, it notes that they are to be reported to the Office of State Ethics. It would be more appropriate for these expenditures to be reported to the State Elections Enforcement Commission given its role in the investigation and enforcement of election laws.
- in the provision (Sec 20) that requires a searchable internet database of ad buys that the reference to providers would benefit from being more comprehensive such as "Any certified competitive video service provider holding either a Certificate of Cable Franchise Authority or a Certificate of Video Franchise Authority, as defined in 16-1(a)(47-49), ..." in order to make clear and explicit that the provision would cover all the different providers of video service -- the cable companies that still operate in their usual former cable franchise areas, as well as those companies like AT&T (using Internet Protocol TV), and Verizon (Fios).

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut thanks you for the opportunity to provide comment on this bill.

