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Testimony of Cheri Quickmire

Executive Director Common Cause in Connecticut

Before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 18, 2013

Re:

House Bill 6633 AAC Campaign Finance Law and Prior Bad Acts;
Senate Bill 1119 AAC The Citizens' Election Fund;
Senate Bill 1125 AAC Campaign Finance Filings and Technical and Conforming Changes to Campaign Finance Statutes;
Senate Bill 1120 AAC The Maximum Amount an Individual May Contribute to the State Central Committee of a Party;
Senate Bill 1126 AAC Advertisement Books for State Central Committees;
Senate Bill 6632 AAC the Maximum Amount an Individual May Contribute to a Town Committee;
Senate Bill 1127 AAC Campaign Contributions by State Contractors;
House Bill 6289AAC Weekly Campaign Financial Statements

Chairman Musto, Chairman Jutila and distinguished members of the GAE Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. 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 am submitting testimony in favor of a number of bills that I believe will help Connecticut strengthen the integrity of the Citizens Election Program – our landmark public financing program and two that I think are problematic.

House Bill 6633 AAC Campaign Finance Law and Prior Bad Acts proposes restrictions over anyone with a prior record of misappropriation or misuse of public campaign finance funds by campaign treasurers who are responsible for the funds going in and out of a campaign committee and candidates who receive campaign funds from the Citizens' Election Fund.

Clearly, campaign treasurers hold critical positions on a campaign committee and supervision or additional oversight by the State Elections Enforcement Commission may be warranted. We do not necessarily agree that candidates should be prohibited from receiving funds after qualifying for public financing regardless of a felony conviction on their record – provided that the person in question has completed her/his sentence and any parole. The voters in that district are the responsible parties for deciding whether or not the candidate becomes eligible for public funds

and, ultimately, possibly elected to office. The state does not have sufficient information about whether or not an individual will commit the same offense again to prohibit them from receiving funds. We think this is an over reach.

Senate Bill 1119 AAC the Citizens' Election Fund It is of concern that due to annual 40% reduction in the amount of money deposited in the CEF since 2011 that there will be insufficient funds in the abandoned property fund to cover the Citizens' Election Program grants and that the amount of the Citizens' Election Fund will be sufficient to cover the level of participation of qualified candidates. To date, this successful program has been able to make a grant to every candidate that qualifies for one. In this past election some 74 percent of candidates participated in the Citizens' Election Program. The concern is that in a statewide election year with multiple participating gubernatorial candidates this may not be possible. As SEEC describes, there is a need for expanded "overdraft protections" already in statute (Section 9-750) by allowing funds to be moved to cover shortages in the CEP. It is critical that we ensure this model program is adequately funded.

Senate Bill 1125 AAC Campaign Finance Filings and Making Technical and Conforming Changes to Campaign Finance Law

Senate Bill 1120 AAC The Maximum Amount an Individual May Contribute to the State Central Committee of a Party;

Senate Bill 1126 AAC Advertisement Books for State Central Committees;

Senate Bill 6632 AAC the Maximum Amount an Individual May Contribute to a Town Committee;

Senate Bill 1127 AAC Campaign Contributions by State Contractors

Common Cause recognizes the problems that candidates face post Citizens United v FEC. We are willing to look at increased contribution packages as long as we ensure the viability of the Citizens Election Program.

We are unwilling to consider allowing state contractors to contribute to election financing given the record of corruption in Connecticut. You are probably aware that we have testified against Advertisement books in the past. We are willing to consider this as part of an overall package – with small dollar amounts.

As recently as last week New Mexico passed a law that allows candidates, after an initial grant, to raise small dollar donations – up to $100.00 – and receive a 4-1 match from the state. We should consider this type of option to safeguard the CEP.

We do expect that the state continue our commitment to open and transparent disclosure of campaign funding and look forward to working with you on an enhanced disclosure bill this session.

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