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CGA General Administrations & Elections Committee

March 25, 2013 Public Hearing

**Comments On:**

SB 5 AAC Changes to Campaign Finance Laws and Other Election Laws

SB 1146 AAC Cross-Endorsements

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League of Women Voters of Connecticut

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The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a nonpartisan, statewide organization committed to effective public policy and the active involvement of citizens in their government. On behalf of the League, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 5 AAC *Changes to Campaign Finance Laws and Other Election Laws* and SB 1146 AAC *Cross-Endorsements*.

**SB 5 AAC Changes to Campaign Finance Laws and Other Election Laws**

Over the years, the League of Women Voters of Connecticut has strongly supported campaign finance reform 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."

The League believes that democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and that the right to vote with confidence in the election process *with adequate information with which to make informed decisions* must be guaranteed to all. 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, we believe that more can be done in the public interest to ensure that Connecticut citizens have adequate information to make informed decisions at the ballot box.

The League ***strongly supports*** the expanded disclosure provisions contained in SB 5. This bill clarifies that the definition of "entity" includes both for-profit and not-for-

profit corporations and requires corporate and other entities to disclose 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. The bill also requires any entity operating in this state to disclose campaign-related disbursements to the public on its website and to disclose campaign expenditures to its shareholders, members or donors either by including it in regular, periodic reports or providing a link on its website to the disclosure reports filed with the State Elections Enforcement Commission. The League also supports expansion of the "stand by your ad" provisions to require identification of an entity's top five donors and a website link which will provide the names and addresses of all donors subject to disclosure. 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 process.

In contrast to our support for the disclosure provisions, the League is concerned about the across-the-board doubling or near doubling of contribution limits to state central committees, town committees, legislative caucus and legislative leadership committees and certain other political committees (Section 7) and the doubling of the aggregate limit on contributions made by individuals to candidates or committees under Connecticut General Statute Section 9-611 (Section 19). 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 and create opportunities for undue influence.

#### **SB 1146 AAC Cross-Endorsements**

The League believes that the requirements for the placement of petitioning or minor party candidates on the ballot should not be made more restrictive than at present. Under current law, candidates may be cross-endorsed on the ballot by two or more parties. This bill would eliminate cross-endorsements and further provide that "[n]o candidate who is not enrolled as a member of a party may be endorsed by such party." The League **opposes** this bill.

Third parties serve a role in highlighting ignored issues. They also can help encourage major parties to take up their views/policy stands. Given the dominance of the two party system, allowing third parties to endorse a major party candidate enables them to have a candidate that they believe has a chance of winning and representing their views on a majority of issues.

SB 1146 appears designed to address the issue of "unknown votes" for cross-endorsed candidates using our current voting technology by eliminating cross-endorsements altogether. The League believes that minor parties serve an important role in our democracy and that their right to be heard should not be restricted for reasons of convenience or technology. Please vote NO on SB 1146.

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