



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.®

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CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 3, 2014 Public Hearing

Testimony Submitted by Christine S. Horrigan, Government Chair

Support for:

Raised Bill No. 227

AAC State Elections Enforcement Commission Committee Review

Opposition to:

Raised Bill No. 5277

AAC A Knowing and Wilful Violation of Chapter 155

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut is a statewide organization with over 1600 members committed to effective public policy and the active involvement of citizens in their government. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments on two campaign finance bills before you today.

The League believes that the goals of a campaign finance system should ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence and enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office. No system, however complete or well-meaning, is effective if it is unenforceable. An elections commission with investigatory and subpoena powers is essential to any campaign reform. Strong penalties should be provided for violators.

The League *supports* RB 227 *AAC State Elections Enforcement Commission Committee Review*. Passage of this bill would expand the investigatory powers of the SEEC by allowing it to inspect bank statements of any candidate committee not randomly selected for audit. Such inspections may act as a deterrent, aid in the discovery of campaign finance violations and ease the administrative burden on the SEEC with respect to audits. *Please vote YES on RB 227.*

Conceptually, the League supports raising the permissible fines under Connecticut General Statute §9-623 for knowing and wilful campaign violations. However, we *oppose* eliminating the criminal penalties, including the possibility of imprisonment, for such violations as proposed under RB 5277 *AAC A Knowing and Wilful Violation of Chapter 155*. Given the staggering sums of money poured into our political system to influence election outcomes, the possibility of a fine – even a substantial one – may be viewed simply as the cost of doing business. The threat of imprisonment has a more potent deterrent effect, although even that is not foolproof as evidenced by the recent convictions of politicians and campaign operatives in Connecticut. The League believes that a knowing and wilful violation of the campaign laws should remain a crime, subject to both a fine *and* the risk of imprisonment, in order to combat corruption and undue influence and maintain the public's confidence in government. *Please vote NO on RB 5277.*

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on these important bills