



Joint Testimony of

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Yale University, Classes of 2016 and 2017 respectively

Support for S.B. No. 228

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Chairman Musto, Chairman Jutila, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to jointly testify in favor of this exceptionally important bill. We are students at Yale University and respectively the Executive Director and Campaign Finance Director of Democracy United, a non-partisan organization working for fairness, transparency, and accessibility in government. **We wish to express our enthusiastic support for Senate Bill. No. 228 An Act Establishing A Pilot Program For Municipal Campaign Finance Filings. However, we ask the Government Administration and Elections Committee to consider amending the bill with an additional important change for municipal campaign finance record law.** Specifically, we ask the Committee to consider modifying Connecticut General Statutes §9-608(c)(7) to increase the number of years that municipal campaign finance records must be retained. These records should be retained substantially beyond the trifling 5 years currently required.

Strengthen Transparency and Accessibility of Municipal Campaign Finance Records

For the past several months, Democracy United has worked closely with The City of New Haven's Public Campaign Finance Board, The Democracy Fund, to research the effects of public campaign financing in New Haven and to advocate for legislative tweaks to improve the program's functioning. Currently, we are engaged in a research project to digitize the campaign finance records of the City of New Haven. Our goal is to use statistical analysis to quantify the efficacy of public campaign financing at increasing voter engagement, especially among low-income and minority voters who have been historically underrepresented in the political process. Our initial data has been promising.

However, immediately after starting our inquiry, we discovered that New Haven's campaign finance record retention, though permissible under current law, is woefully inadequate.

Low Accessibility

- 1) Records for New Haven's non-participating mayoral candidates exist only on paper. This format requires more work to analyze than electronic copies would. More importantly, paper means campaign finance records are available to view only during limited business hours, and are all but inaccessible to constituents who work or have classes between 9am and 5pm.

This said, New Haven is unique among all municipalities in Connecticut in already having some municipal campaign finance records held digitally by the SEEC

(specifically, the records of mayoral candidates participating in Connecticut's only municipal public campaign financing program). We have found that municipal campaign finance records held by the SEEC are substantially easier to access and more transparent than city clerk-held paper records. What's more, the system works conveniently and effectively for candidates, municipalities, and constituents. This has given us tremendous confidence in the pilot program proposed by S.B. 228.

We believe that the SEEC should hold records for as wide an array of candidates and municipalities as possible. The pilot program established by S.B. 228 is a powerful step towards solving a limitation of current record retention procedures. Digital records held by the state would be less burdensome for city clerks and considerably more accessible for interested constituents.

Insufficient and Unacceptable Retention Timeframe

- 2) **The New Haven City Clerk's office throws out campaign finance records after five years, with explicit permission from Connecticut General Statutes §9-608(c)(7). This astonishing fact reflects a practice antithetical to transparency and injurious to the integrity of Connecticut's elections. For example, consider a ten term incumbent mayor, whose records for only the past two elections are available for public scrutiny. Or, for example, consider the many mayors who go on to run for higher statewide office, including Governor. For such candidates, previous received contributions matters of importance for the entire state. They should be easily and consistently available for scrutiny.**

A Proposed Amendment

Connecticut's retention timeframe for municipal campaign finance records is insufficient and needs to be increased. We ask the GAE Committee to consider amending this bill or the related Senate Bill No. 91 to modify Connecticut General Statutes §9-608(c)(7) such that municipal campaign finance records are required to be retained for **at least 10 years** (increased from 5). Even better would be permanent retention in electronic form. **The public's right to view campaign finance records is an important check on financial impropriety. We believe this right should not be impeached by the passing of time.**

Respectfully Submitted,

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