



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CONNECTICUT, INC.®

1890 Dixwell Avenue, Suite 203  
Hamden, CT 06514-3183

203-288-7996 Fax 203-288-7998 [www.lwvct.org](http://www.lwvct.org)

## **CGA Government Administration and Elections Committee**

**March 17, 2014 Public Hearing**

**Campaign Finance Bills**

**Comments Submitted by Christine S. Horrigan, Government Chair**

### **Support for:**

**Senate Bill No. 455**

**AAC THE CITIZENS' ELECTION FUND**

**Section 20 of Senate Bill No. 451**

**AAC GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION, STATE CONTRACTING, REGIONAL  
SCHOOL BOARDS AND THE STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION**

### **Opposition to:**

**Senate Bill No. 453**

**AAC STATE PARTY FEDERAL ACCOUNTS**

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 the campaign finance bills before you today.

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut 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.

### ***SB 455 – AAC The Citizens' Election Fund***

The League believes that partial public financing of campaigns for state offices will enable candidates to run for office regardless of personal finances and can aid in removing the undue influence of large scale money. We *strongly support* SB 455. By extending "overdraft protection" to the CEF, this bill ensures that the Citizens' Election Fund is capable of paying grants to all qualifying candidates during an election cycle. It eliminates the uncertainty associated with estimating the sufficiency of the Fund based on predictions of who will run for office and, of those individuals, who will choose to apply for grants, and the possibility that grants will be reduced proportionally if the monies in the Fund are insufficient, allowing candidates to raise additional funds with no restrictions on qualifying contributions.

In light of the recent cuts to the Citizens' Election Fund, the League believes that passage of this bill is critical to guarantee the smooth operation of the Fund and to ensure that candidates can compete successfully regardless of personal finances. Please vote YES on SB 455.

***Section 20 of SB 451 – AAC Government Administration, State Contracting, Regional School Boards and the State Elections Enforcement Commission***

Under Section 20 of SB 451, eleven million dollars would be deposited into the Commission's existing reserve account and would be used to pay grants in the event that the funds in the primary account of the Citizens' Election Fund are insufficient to provide full grants to all qualifying candidates. Although the League prefers the approach taken under SB 455 to guarantee the sufficiency of the Citizens' Election Fund, we support Section 20 of this bill as an alternative measure to ensure the continued viability of the Citizens' Election Program.

***SB 453 – AAC State Party Federal Accounts***

As noted earlier, the League believes that one of the primary goals of a campaign finance system should be to combat corruption and undue influence. We actively worked for passage of the historic 2005 Campaign Finance Reform law, which banned state contractor and lobbyist contributions, and subsequent amendments in response to court rulings.

The League *strongly opposes* SB 453. This bill would create a giant loophole in our campaign finance laws and would effectively allow lobbyists (currently limited in amount) and state contractors (currently banned) to make contributions to state candidates through the "back door" of a state party's federal account. The bill would allow up to 50% of the money spent on staff, office space and other permissible expenses, *including organization expenditures*, to be paid out of a party's federal account which may include monies raised from Connecticut state contractors and lobbyists. Since a state party may make unlimited organization expenditures in support of state candidates, there is no realistic limit to the amount of state contractor and lobbyist money that may benefit these candidates.

The League believes that it is critical to the integrity of our elections and the public's confidence in government that funds that are generally prohibited from being used in Connecticut elections do not find their way into those elections through the use of a federal account. We further believe that the approach outlined by the SEEC in its recently released *Advisory Opinion 2014-01* strikes the right balance for use of federal and state accounts by party committees. State party committees should pay for expenses related to state candidates, including organization expenditures, with money raised within the Connecticut campaign finance system in accordance with Connecticut law. Please vote NO on SB 453.

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