

ConnPIRG

— Standing Up —
To Powerful Interests

Testimony of Abraham Scarr, Director
Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG)

in support of

Proposed Senate Bill No. 455:

An Act Concerning the Citizens' Election Fund

and opposed to

Propose Senate Bill No. 453:

An Act Concerning State Party Federal Accounts

Chairperson Musto, Chairperson Jutila and Members of the Committee: My name is Abe Scarr and I am the Director of the Connecticut Public Interest Research Group (ConnPIRG). Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding proposed Senate Bills 453 and 455.

ConnPIRG is a non-profit, non-partisan consumer group. Our democracy program works to foster a more responsive, representative democracy by limiting the influence of special interests and special interest money on our elections and increasing opportunities for citizen participation.

Since its creation, the Citizen's Election Program has had a positive impact on elections in Connecticut and, therefore, in the functioning of our democracy. In the 2006 General Assembly Elections, before reforms were in place, less than half of contributions to candidates were from individuals. In the 2008 and 2010 elections, 97% came from individuals. The majority of those contributions were under \$100. Campaign funding is coming from a broader array of Connecticut residents giving less money. This shift from large donor to small donor is vital to keeping candidates and elected officials responsive to the public.

Proposed Senate Bill 445: Support

SB 455 ensures the Clean Election Funds (CEF) is capable of paying grants to all qualifying candidates, regardless of the size of the field of candidates. The bill solves an almost inevitable cash flow problem.

Proposed Senate Bill 443: Oppose

According to a recent advisory opinion¹ by the State Elections Enforcement Commission, current law sets guidelines for cost sharing for state parties between state and federal accounts. While the details can get complicated, the general principle is simple: "Connecticut committees pay for their expenses with money raised within the Connecticut campaign finance system, i.e. from permissible contributions or public financing grants, properly reported under Connecticut law."²

¹ http://www.ct.gov/seec/lib/seec/laws_and_regulations/advisory_opinion_2014-01.pdf

² Ibid. Page 2

State parties are responsible for structuring expenses and cost sharing agreements to ensure money raised outside of state campaign finance laws are not used to support or oppose candidates for state office. If federal staff or resources are used to support state candidates, state funds must reimburse the federal committee at fair market value.

As written, SB 443 would allow state parties to pay up to 50% of staff, office, or other permissible expenses from federal accounts. This weakens the firewall between state and federal accounts and could lead to an influx of lobbyist and state contractor money into state elections.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of proposed Senate Bill 445 and opposed to proposed Senate Bill 443.

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