



New Haven Democracy Fund

"To ensure that all the citizens of New Haven have a fair and meaningful opportunity to participate in the election of mayor."
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Testimony of Jared Milfred
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Support for H.B. No. 6745 An Act Establishing A Pilot Program For Municipal Campaign Finance Filings

Chairman Jutila, Chairman Cassano, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of H.B. 6745, an extraordinarily important bill to improve efficiency and transparency of campaign finance filings in Connecticut.

My name is Jared Milfred. I am the Chairman of The New Haven Democracy Fund, a municipal public campaign finance program which provides candidates for city office in New Haven with public funds to conduct campaigns. Concurrently, I serve as Executive Director of Democracy United, a non-partisan student organization at Yale University which promotes fairness, transparency, and accessibility in government.

In the year 2015, paper campaign finance records have no place in our elections. The Federal Election Commission has made digital campaign finance records of federal candidates available online for over two decades. And the Connecticut State Elections Enforcement Commission now does the same for all candidates for state office. Records at the municipal level should be no different. But unfortunately, municipal campaign finance filings in Connecticut today are available only on paper and are accessible only in person, between the limited hours of 9am and 4pm. They are impossible to search with a simple "Control+F". And worse, they are permanently destroyed after five years. Connecticut can and must do better.

The pilot program established by H.B. 6745 is a strong first step toward solving the inefficiency, inaccessibility, and lack of transparency which plague paper campaign finance records. The program takes advantage of SEEC's powerful pre-existing digital infrastructure, at negligible cost to the state, to significantly ease the paperwork burden on town clerks and candidates themselves. Moreover, SEEC's digital web portal for campaign finance filings makes records easily accessible to every citizen of Connecticut and guarantees that records are retained indefinitely.

Electronic Retention Stops Records From Being Destroyed

Currently, campaign finance records of municipal candidates are filed and held on paper by the municipality's town clerk. However, the town clerks of most municipalities in Connecticut destroy campaign finance records after five years, with explicit authorization from CGS §9-608(c)(7). This short retention timeframe is antithetical to transparency and harmful to the integrity of Connecticut's elections. Journalists and interested members of the public often want to

examine old contribution records, especially of candidates who go on to run for higher office. They might wonder about a candidate: *Who helped her launch her political career? Has he ever taken money from a Political Action Committee?* Under current law, these questions are often impossible to answer, since the necessary contribution records have been destroyed.

The problem impacts not only municipal races. Consider the many municipal executives who go on to run for statewide office, including Governor. For such candidates, previous contribution records are matters of importance for the entire state. They should be easily and permanently available for scrutiny.

Filing municipal records with SEEC, as proposed in H.B. 6745's pilot program, definitively solves the five-year retention problem. Campaign finance records filed and stored digitally by SEEC will be available online indefinitely. This ensures complete transparency, and too, ensures that records will be available should a candidate be accused of violating campaign finance law. The importance of preserving campaign finance records cannot be overstated in a state where several prominent candidates have been convicted for breaking campaign finance law. **The public's right to view campaign finance records is an important check on financial impropriety. This right should not be impeached by the passing of time.**

The Pilot Program Increases Transparency and Accessibility of Campaign Finance Records

Even before they are destroyed, paper records are inconvenient to file and inconvenient to access. Paper records require substantially more time to examine and scrutinize than electronic records would. They cannot easily be searched, summed, or made into graphs, deterring journalists from investigating or reporting the contributions given to municipal candidates. Furthermore, paper 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 4pm. Electronic retention solves these problems by making digital copies of campaign finance records viewable and downloadable on the State Elections Enforcement Commission website at any time and from any location.

Electronic Filing Eases the Paperwork Burden on Candidates

Electronic filing significantly reduces the paperwork burden on candidates and campaign treasurers. The pilot program would allow them to file records using an online system which is compatible with software commonly used internally by campaigns. Additionally, SEEC's digital filing system minimizes the burden of inputting and checking records by giving campaigns a central repository to save and review filings. The online repository is accessible by multiple members of a campaign team, no matter their physical location.

New Haven is Proof that Filing Records with SEEC Works

New Haven is unique among all municipalities in Connecticut in already having some municipal campaign finance records filed with and held by SEEC. Specifically, candidates participating in New Haven's public campaign financing program file SEEC Form 20s with the state. We have found that records held by the SEEC are substantially easier to access and examine than paper records held by the New Haven Town Clerk. What's more, filing with SEEC is preferred by all parties involved. Participating candidates and their treasurers praise the convenience of the system,

journalists appreciate unparalleled access to records, and the SEEC is easily able to integrate municipal filings into their digital infrastructure and searchable online database. New Haven's success with electronic filing is strong evidence that the pilot program established by H.B. 6745 would succeed.

A vote for H.B. 6745 is a vote for transparency and a vindication of the right of every constituent to know where political candidates receive their contributions. I strongly urge a Joint Favorable Report.

Respectfully Submitted,

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