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**Testimony of Cheri Quickmire,  
Executive Director, Connecticut Common Cause  
To Government Administration and Elections Committee  
February 13, 2013**

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. Common Cause in Connecticut has a strong history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics. We have more than 7,500 members and activists in Connecticut.

**I am presenting testimony in support of House Bill 6745, An Establishing a Pilot Program for Municipal Campaign Finance Filings and House Bill 6749, An Act Concerning Expansion of Public Financing of Municipal Campaigns.** In 2005, when comprehensive campaign finance reform passed, there was a provision for a pilot program of public financing for municipalities. The New Haven Democracy Fund was approved by the State Elections Enforcement Commission, starting in 2007. These two programs have been helping to stop the pay to play culture in government and helping to ensure that non-profits and ordinary citizens have access to elected officials equal to that of well moneyed special interests for more than six years. Connecticut has become known as a national leader in campaign finance reform.

**H.B. 6745** seeks to create a pilot program in which the State Elections Enforcement would create a repository of municipal campaign filings for up to 20 municipalities. This program would remove these filing duties from the town clerks in the participating municipalities, and they would become the responsibility of The State Elections Enforcement Commission. The benefits of this program would include removing a substantial burden from the affected town clerks and creating an electronic repository which can be maintained indefinitely, as opposed to paper records which may be shredded after a period of time. In addition, affected municipal candidates and treasurers would have the option to file forms electronically. This bill would substantially increase the ease of access of municipal campaign finance filings by making them available online thereby increasing the transparency of the elections substantially.

**H.B. 6749** would increase the number of municipalities which could participate in public financing of municipal elections. In 2007, New Haven became the only municipality approved to take part in the pilot program of municipal public financing of elections. Called the Democracy Fund, the voluntary program has been used by Mayoral Candidates in New Haven

since the 2007 election. The Democracy Fund, which provides public matching funds and public financing grants to mayoral candidates with their voluntary agreement to abide by various fundraising and spending restrictions, has clearly met some key goals of public financing. The New Haven Democracy Fund has increased citizen civic engagement by affording ordinary citizens the opportunity to participate in mayoral campaigns through small dollar donations. In the 2013 New Haven Mayoral race, the publicly financed candidate was able to keep pace with the party backed privately financed candidate, Toni Harp, and nearly all of the donations for the candidate participating in public financing were small dollar donations from within New Haven.<sup>i</sup> Ms. Harp, who won the race, raised over \$103,000 (as of October 10, 2013). Justin Elicker, the challenger, raised \$96,823.21 from individuals and \$3,530 from the Democracy Fund for a total of \$100,353.21.<sup>ii</sup> During the primary for that race, three candidates used the Democracy Fund to compete. The Democracy Fund paid \$111,250 total to the three participating candidates in the primary race.<sup>iii</sup> Mayor Harp did not participate in the Democracy Fund for either the primary or general election.

In 2011 the incumbent, long-time Mayor John DeStefano, did not choose to participate in the Democracy Fund, although he did so in 2007 and 2009. His primary opponents, Jeffrey Kerekes and Anthony Dawson, each participated in the fund and qualified for a \$17,000 grant. Mr. Kerekes raised \$8,202 and Mr. Dawson raised \$6,420 in small dollar donations (which were matched by the Fund in addition to their \$17,000 grant).<sup>iv</sup> Mayor DeStefano raised over \$572,000 for his successful mayoral campaign.

The Democracy Fund has allowed candidates to run who do not have the ties to big money and who are not political insiders. In fact the Democracy Fund has been credited with creating the first competitive mayoral races in two decades. Public financing of elections has been highly successful in Connecticut at both the state and municipal level. Municipal public financing should continue and be expanded in Connecticut. H.B. 6749 will do just that.

Common Cause in Connecticut respectfully asks the Committee to consider the passage of both H.B. 6745 and H.B. 6749.

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/oct\\_10\\_money\\_maps/](http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/oct_10_money_maps/)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/oct\\_campaign\\_finance\\_fillings/](http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/oct_campaign_finance_fillings/)

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/Government/DemocracyFund.asp>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/Government/pdfs/aldermen%20report%202011.pdf>