



Connecticut Working Families Organization
30 Arbor Street, Hartford, CT 06106
Workingfamilies.org/Connecticut
(860) 523-1699

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Testimony regarding SB 1126, AAC Revisions to Campaign Finance Laws

Submitted by Lindsay Farrell, Director of the Connecticut Working Families Party.

Co-Chair Cassano, Co-Chair Jutila, Ranking Member McLachlan, Ranking Member Smith, and all the other members of the Government, Administration and Elections Committee:

The Working Families Party is Connecticut's largest minor party. Our affiliated organizations represent over 110,000 working and retired men and women, we regularly garner tens of thousands of votes in statewide elections, and we have helped to elect cross-endorsed candidates, as well as our own for municipal and now legislative office. The WFP fights for an economy that is fair for everyone, one that provides opportunity for fair wages and benefits for all workers, education opportunities for any student, and a fair and open democracy for all people regardless of their wealth and access to power.

Without getting into specifics, Working Families generally supports many of the goals of this legislation, and shining more light onto independent expenditures is a good thing.

We ask the committee to reject portion of the legislation, **Sections 20 and 21**. These sections appear to significantly change the nominating and endorsement deadlines for any candidate using the Citizen's Election Program. It would require the following of us:

1. As a minor party which frequently endorses other parties' candidates, we would need to make our endorsement decisions by early June instead of by early September because many of the candidates who we consider use the CEP and would become un-endorsable after this new deadline.
2. When we run our own candidates, we would have to make decisions in early June about their participation in the Citizen's Election Program that they may not yet be able to make. We would also need to file the additional signatures that minor party CEP candidates are required to file two months earlier than we currently do.
3. When we cross-endorse candidates who are using the Citizen's Election Program, in the cases when we need to collect petition signatures, we would have two months less time to collect those signatures as well.

This new timeframe is unreasonably burdensome on us. It would force us to make decisions about who to support prematurely, or shut us out of participating in the electoral process entirely. As a third party, we do not have the same party infrastructure the major parties have. However, as a third party we prioritize advocacy on issues that are important to our members, and the opportunity for voters who feel underrepresented in our political system to have their voices heard. Moving up these deadlines interferes with our process of evaluating candidates' records, allowing members to interview candidates seeking our support, and to make decisions in a transparent and democratic way.

These changes also make ballot access and participation in the Citizen's Election Program even harder. For example, current statute requires minor parties to collect signatures to access the CEP, in addition to raising the qualifying contributions that the major party candidates need to collect. It's a lot of signatures in the first place; the threshold of 20% of the number of voters in the election the last time it was held is a challenge even with a strong campaign operation already in place. This language makes this process even harder by requiring that these signatures be collected months earlier than the current system demands.

Minor parties play an important role in our democracy. We inject ideas into the political conversation and provide a voice for voters who do not feel represented by the major political parties. Every time a new rule is legislated that creates another obstacle or challenge for third parties, our system becomes less accessible to additional voices, and therefore less democratic. Please consider this when evaluating language that affects party nominations and endorsements, and reject this part of the bill.

Thank you.