

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1188

AN ACT CONCERNING REFERENDA, INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURES AND

Title: CERTAIN OTHER POLITICAL SPENDING.

Vote Date: 03/27/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/10/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to enhance campaign finance laws in Connecticut by introducing updated and improved regulations. Specifically, the amended bill includes a provision that prohibits contributions and expenditures from foreign nationals, which aims to prevent any foreign interference in Connecticut's referenda and elections. Other provisions, such as those related to independent expenditure political committees and statutory adjustments, have been removed from the amended bill. The primary objective of the bill is to address concerns over foreign contributions in the state's elections and referendums. Currently, there are no limits on political spending by foreign actors, which presents a significant risk to the integrity of Connecticut's democratic process. By banning contributions from foreign nationals and implementing stricter enforcement measures, the state hopes to mitigate the potential for foreign influence in its elections.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[State Elections Enforcement Commission, Executive Director and General Counsel, Michael J. Brandi](#): supports this bill as it makes necessary updates and improvements to campaign finance law in the State. It is stated that the bill includes a ban on contributions and expenditures by foreign nationals and implements updates to independent expenditure political committees in line with federal court rulings. Further, this proposal clarifies the laws surrounding referendum expenditures and attribution requirements for independent expenditures. Additionally, the proposal includes changes to organization expenditure party candidate listings and extends the time for committees to return surplus CEP funds. It is stated that these changes would improve existing election laws and help prevent foreign

interference in Connecticut referendums and elections by limiting foreign spending and providing adequate enforcement.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[League of Women Voters of Connecticut \(LWVCT\), Campaign Finance Specialist, Pamela Klem](#): supports this bill as it aims to recognize referendum spending as a type of independent spending, require attribution and disclosure for expenditures related to referenda, preclude foreign interference in state referenda and elections, and clarify the distinction between expenditures covered by the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) and independent expenditures. It is stated that disclosing the source and funding of political content targeted to voters will strengthen elections and democracy. The LWVCT further explains the importance of transparency in political messaging for both referenda issues and specific candidates, while also providing safeguards against interference in elections by potentially hostile foreign actors.

[Common Cause Connecticut, Alex Knopp](#): supports this bill as it would prevent Connecticut from becoming one of the fronts in Vladimir Putin's war against western democracies by closing a loophole in Connecticut's campaign finance law. It is stated that the current law allows foreign individuals and entities to spend foreign funds without limit to influence the outcome of the state and local ballot referenda. It is also stated that a recent legal decision confirmed that foreign spending could influence the outcome of state and local referenda. This bill is necessary because Connecticut's campaign finance laws contain a huge loophole that allows foreign individuals and entities to spend foreign funds without limit to influence the outcome of the state and local ballot referenda.

[Connecticut Resident, Linda Dalessio](#): supports this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Anonymous](#): opposes this bill.

[Connecticut Resident, Debbie Esposito](#): opposes this bill, specifically lines 1040-1056 of the proposed bill as it leaves complainants no recourse to election law challenges.

Reported by: Lukas Houle

Date: 03-27-2023