

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-253

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING FOREIGN POLITICAL SPENDING.

Vote Date: 3/15/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/4/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The legislation, as amended, aims to serve as a proactive measure against foreign interference in state referenda and elections, as referenda particularly are not protected under current law. This is accomplished by allowing greater enforcement of violations to further deter interference and affording the State Elections Enforcement Commission more time to investigate political spending cases, which require thorough investigation and need sufficient time to be completed.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Michael Brandi, SEEC Executive Director, Supports:

This proposal prohibits foreign interference in both referenda and elections in Connecticut and provides for the enforcement of these violations, an issue which also exists in states such as New York, Texas, Montana, North Dakota, and Maine. There is a serious problem in the bill as drafted, however, with the language which restricts the agency's enforcement of the ban if not finished in one year. These complaints would likely require lengthy investigations, and therefore the one-year limit would hinder the ability to enforce the provision and should be clarified to allow sufficient time for investigation and hearing processes to be completed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Pamela Klem, CT League of Women Voters:

The proposal provides safeguards against interference in election by hostile foreign acts, closes a loophole related to expenditures on referenda, and expands transparency to voters.

The citizens of Connecticut deserve to know the source behind political messaging that influences their vote for both referenda issues and specific candidates.

Alex Knopp, Connecticut Advisory Board of Common Cause, Supports:

Urge to approve the bill which closes a loophole in CT campaign finance law which allows foreign individuals and entities to spend foreign funds without limit to influence the outcome of the state and local ballot referenda. Federal law declares that state ballot initiatives are not technically elections, and therefore it is the duty of individual states to protect against foreign interference.

Cheri Quickmire, Common Cause in Connecticut Executive Director, Supports:

Endorses testimony of Alex Knopp and urges committee to review his statement carefully.

Linda Pyrde, Supports:

Urges the committee to support the bill. Bi-Partisan federal legislation which would close the foreign money loophole was introduced in the House in November 2023 but is now stalled. Other states have not waited for Congress and moved forward on the issue, passing their own legislation, and Connecticut should follow suit.

Carol Rizzolo, Supports:

In agreement with former GAE House Chair, Alex Knopp; believes the bill would provide important protection to our system of elections.

Dr. Linda Dalessio, Supports:

Supports the bill, questions the ability for it to be implemented successfully.

Arthur Casale, Supports:

Supports, under the belief that Russia and China are interfering with elections.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Lindsay de Brito

Date: 3/21/24