



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN
EDUCATION FUND

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To: Senate Committee on Campaign Finance Reform, Rural issues and Information Technology

Re: Support for Senate Bill 12, Special Session Bill 1, and SB 25

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is pleased to offer our support for this proposal for comprehensive campaign finance reform. These bills make important and needed amendments to the statute, which has regulated campaign financing in Wisconsin for many years.

The intent of our current law, enacted in the 1970s, was that state funds assure that state candidates have adequate resources to reach the voters with their messages, that contributions and spending are limited and special interest influence is controlled and disclosed. Until the late 1980s, most candidates used these state funds in exchange for keeping spending under the limits, and the check-off provided enough money to fund full grants.

- By the 1990s several things had changed. The number of tax filers checking-off dropped significantly, full grants equaling 35% of the limits were not available, and candidates often faced high spending opponents. It has become too risky for candidates to apply for the ever-smaller grants while accepting the 1970s spending limits and possibly facing big-spending opponents.
- Our current system clearly no longer works. Public funds are not there but special interest funds are - and are used by both candidate committees and independent spenders.

This legislation goes a long way toward assuring adequately and equitably financed campaigns. We offer the following thoughts about some key provisions:

- The check-off should be raised to \$5 and GPR funds provided as needed. This guarantees that full grants will be available and that candidates will not be discouraged from applying for the funds.
- Candidate spending limits are increased to amounts adequate for viable campaigns. The League believes this will allow candidates to effectively reach voters with their messages.
- Grants are set at 45% of spending limits for partisan offices. While we believe a higher level would be preferable, further reducing the level of private funds, 45% will provide adequate funds for candidates to get their message out given the spending limit increases.
- Supplemental grants are provided for victims of independent spending and opponent spending beyond the limits as a means of discouraging such special interest spending by both candidates and independents.

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- There should be full disclosure of expenditures and the sources of funds by all groups that are involved in Wisconsin campaigning which is defined as express advocacy according to the US Supreme Court decision in 2007 and the related Federal Elections Commission regulations adopted in Nov. 2007.
- Most committee-to-committee transfers are eliminated as is special status for legislative campaign committees, both of which have become ways to conceal special interest influence, which unfairly increases incumbent and leadership control of the legislative process.

If enacted, Special Session Bill 1 will provide Wisconsin with a workable basic comprehensive campaign finance law and we urge its passage. The League, however, will continue - now and after passage - to support and work for certain stronger provisions.

- We would favor a higher percentage of public funding for all state campaigns. Whatever the level, we strongly believe that individual contribution limits should be lowered. Current limits give candidates with access to large contributors a significant advantage and continue to provide a channel for special interest influence.
- We would like to see the 6% primary vote requirement lowered as a way to increase public funding for independent and third party candidates, providing voters with a wider choice of viable candidates.

We thank you as always for the opportunity to express our opinion on this very important issue. We particularly thank the Governor and those members of the Legislature who have recognized the timeliness and necessity of achieving bipartisan comprehensive campaign finance reform in Wisconsin.