

**TESTIMONY BEFORE
NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING
COMMISSION**

October 29, 2019

Burchfield Penney Art Center Auditorium
1300 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, New York 14222

Good Morning. My name is Janet Massaro, and I am a member of the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara. On behalf of the League I thank the Commission for the opportunity to speak about campaign finance reform and a small donor matching system for New York State.

The League has long been a leader in reforming our nation's campaign finance system to ensure the public's right to know, to combat corruption and undue influence, to enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office, and to allow maximum citizen participation in the political process. The New York State League and local Leagues have worked tirelessly for state campaign finance reform and public financing for state elections. We know the well-documented benefits of public financing, which includes a greater diversity of candidates elected to office, an increase of contributors, especially the number of small donors, and greater participation of the public in the electoral process. We know that New York City's successful public financing program can serve as a model for a state-wide system.

However, the League also knows that effective, independent and adequately funded enforcement and lower limits on all campaign contributions are fundamental to reforming our state's broken campaign finance laws. These reforms are not to be viewed as mere additions to implementing public

financing, but as essential components of a cNew York State campaign finance system.

Specifically, the League urges you to include the following critical reforms:

- **Reduce contributions for all candidates, not just those participating in the public matching program.** New York currently has the highest contribution limits of the 39 states that limit contributions, of which \$67,700 for statewide office is the most egregious example. Contribution limits for all candidates should be lowered to levels consistent with federal limits and lowered across the board so that candidates will not be discouraged from participating in the public financing program.
- **Establish an independent campaign finance enforcement agency outside the Board of Elections to enforce campaign finance laws for all candidates.** Experience to date with the Enforcement Division within the state Board of Elections has not been positive.
- **Provide a guaranteed stream of funding to ensure oversight is strong and the public's money is protected.**
- **Reduce or eliminate entirely contributions by lobbyists and contractors doing business with the state.**
- **Place limits on party housekeeping accounts at all levels.** Currently there are no limits. Housekeeping money has long been a major source of avoidance of state contribution limits.
- **Establish strict requirements for disclosure and reporting of contributions and expenditures like those in New York City.**

A small donor public matching program without these reforms will discourage candidates from participating in the new system. It will allow the status quo, in which organized interests and large contributions will continue to have unchecked influence in Albany. Such an outcome is unacceptable. We ask the Commission to institute a long-overdue, complete reform of the state's ineffective campaign finance laws.

On behalf of the League, I thank the Commission for inviting us to speak today.