



Seattle City Council

January 17, 2008

Senate Government Operations and Elections Committee
466 John A. Cherberg Building
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Senate Government Operations and Elections Committee,

We are writing to you in favor of SB 5278, which gives cities the option to establish programs to publicly finance campaigns.

In cities around state, but especially in a city the size of Seattle, the price of running for public office has drastically increased over the past decade. In the last few election cycles, the amount of money one must raise to wage a competitive race for Seattle City Council has exceeded \$250,000, often with large portions of a campaign budget financed with the candidate's own funds. With pressure on candidates to raise such large amounts of money, citizens with excellent qualifications have begun to feel priced out of the process.

The current system of electoral financing overwhelmingly favors the incumbent candidate, causing the regular voter to feel their votes have been disenfranchised. Incumbents have begun employing a strategy over the past few election cycles, where they begin raising large amounts of money nearly two years before election day. When prospective challenger candidates begin to ponder whether or not to run for office, they look at the bank accounts of incumbent candidates, and after seeing a year's head-start in fundraising, they grow intimidated and opt not to run. While this certainly benefits the incumbents, voters are given fewer choices, and many diverse and qualified candidates are thwarted. Candidates of all stripes increasingly chase big checks and ignore pursuit of more and smaller checks. Recent information from Seattle's Ethics and Elections office shows that in 2003 there were a total of 11,687 contributors, of whom 6,227 gave less than \$100. In 2007, there were a total of just 7,412 contributors, of whom only 2,742 gave less than \$100. It's for reasons of equity and equal access that we write to you in support of this bill.

We are especially supportive of this bill because it gives cities the option to have a discussion of whether publicly financed campaigns would benefit their community. In our community, we've spoken to many people who feel disenfranchised with the process. The position of City Councilmember is the most local of positions, yet it has become one of the most expensive seats to attain. Money shouldn't be a barrier when deciding whether or not to run for a city-level office, yet it remains one of the primary factors in determining whether to seek elective office. These sentiments may not be shared in other cities throughout the state, and that's fine. We only request that you allow individual cities around the state to decide whether this proposal is best for them.

Sincerely,


Sally J. Clark

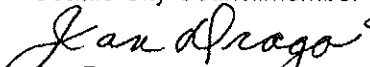
Seattle City Councilmember


Jean Godden

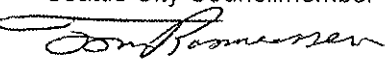
Seattle City Councilmember


Richard Conlin

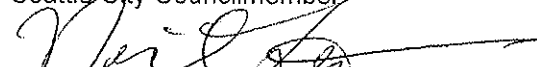
Seattle City Councilmember


Jan Drago

Seattle City Councilmember


Tom Rasmussen

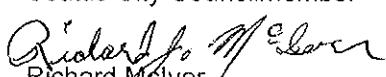
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