



August 10, 2024

The Honorable Anna Caballero  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
State Capitol, Room 412  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cc: The Honorable Alex Lee and Sabrina Cervantes and Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee

**RE: AB 270 (Lee-Cervantes), California Fair Elections Act of 2026 – Support**

Dear Chair Caballero:

As organizations representing a broad cross section of Californians, we are writing to respectfully request that you vote for Assembly Bill 270 which will put the California Fair Elections Act of 2026 on the November 2026 ballot to provide voters the opportunity to remove the current prohibition of public financing of campaigns in California while establishing requirements that public financing systems and candidates using public funding must follow to protect taxpayers and maximize the benefit to voters.

Voters are increasingly concerned about the problem of money in politics. A recent Gallup poll found that only 20% said they were satisfied with the nation's campaign finance laws.<sup>1</sup> In a poll conducted by the California Clean Money Campaign, 81% of likely California voters said Big Money campaign contributors have too much influence over elected officials in California, and 63% said that ordinary voters have too little influence.<sup>2</sup>

Public financing of campaigns addresses these concerns by increasing the power of small donors and ordinary voters to participate in campaigns and have their voices heard. Also, it reduces the barriers to entry for running for office which diversifies the candidate pool by helping qualified candidates from all walks of life represent their communities.

<sup>1</sup> Gallup Poll of 1,017 U.S. residents, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/246272/americans-satisfaction-policy-areas-trends.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> California Clean Money Campaign poll of 1,027 likely November 2024 California voters from March 1-18, 2024.

Fifteen states and 19 municipalities have adopted public financing systems to empower voters and help candidates run campaigns that are more focused on the people they are running to represent. A study by Maplight found that during the first cycle of the matching funds program in Berkeley (in 2018), participating campaigns' donors were spread across more of the city. In addition, the size of the average contribution fell 60% from the previous election.<sup>3</sup> A 2020 study from Georgetown University found that since Seattle began Democracy Vouchers in 2017 the donor pool has become increasingly diverse.<sup>4</sup>

Five charter cities (Berkeley, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco) have public financing systems to amplify the voices of everyday voters and provide candidates with a viable alternative fundraising method not reliant on large wealthy donors or special interests. Seventy-five percent (75%) of voters voted for Los Angeles' Measure H in 2011, 65% voted for Berkeley's Measure X1 in 2016, and 74% voted for Oakland's Measure W in 2022.

Unfortunately, such programs are prohibited in California jurisdictions other than charter cities by the Political Reform Act of 1974 under a provision enacted by Proposition 73 in 1988 that had virtually all of its other provisions invalidated by the courts. This provision must be repealed by the voters to allow counties, districts, general law cities, or the state to enact public financing laws if they chose to.

In 2016, bipartisan supermajorities of the legislature passed, and Governor Jerry Brown signed, SB 1107 (Allen) that would have removed the ban on public financing of campaigns but the courts ruled the question must be put before the voters.

AB 270 will allow voters to ratify the will of the legislature and restore control to local governments and the state by placing the *California Fair Elections Act* on the November 2026 ballot to repeal the ban while requiring that no public moneys earmarked for education, transportation, or public safety be eligible to fund public financing. The measure will also specify basic requirements that public financing systems and candidates using public funding must follow, such as:

- Requiring that voluntarily participating public funding candidates must abide by expenditure limits and meet strict criteria to qualify such as requiring that candidates must receive small dollar contributions or vouchers from a specified number of adult residents.
- Barring the use of public funds to pay for legal defense, fines, or repayments of personal loans to candidates' campaigns.
- Specifying that public funding systems shall not discriminate based on party or according to whether a candidate is a challenger or an incumbent.

Every California jurisdiction deserves the same opportunity that charter cities have to enact systems of public financing of campaigns that work for them. For these reasons, the organizations and individuals below SUPPORT AB 270 and respectfully request your AYE vote.

FROM: California Clean Money Campaign (Sponsor)  
California Common Cause (Co-Sponsor)  
League of Women Voters of California (Co-Sponsor)  
California Church IMPACT  
California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG)  
Consumer Watchdog  
Courage California

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<sup>3</sup> "2018 Fair Elections in Berkeley", Maplight, 2019, <https://maplightarchive.org/story/2018-fair-elections-in-berkeley/>

<sup>4</sup> "Building a More Diverse Donor Coalition — An analysis of the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program in the 2019 Election Cycle". Jennifer Heerwig, Stony Brook University and Brian McCabe, Georgetown University, 2020. <https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/r2skgxfnc230ukkb3dfqgm4576phzabd>

Democracy Policy Network  
Endangered Habitats League  
Fix Democracy First  
Indivisible CA: StateStrong  
Initiate Justice  
MapLight  
Money Out Voters In  
Public Citizen  
RepresentUs  
RepresentUs Los Angeles  
RepresentUs Los-Angeles-San Gabriel Valley  
South Bay Progressive Alliance  
Voices for Progress  
Voters Right to Know