



Date

The Honorable Sabrina Cervantes
Chair, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee
State Capitol, Room 410
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cc: The Honorable Tom Umberg, Ben Allen, and Alex Lee

RE: SB 42 (Umberg-Allen-Lee), California Fair Elections Act of 2026 – Strong Support

Dear Chair Cervantes:

As organizations representing a broad cross section of Californians, we are writing to respectfully request that you vote for Senate Bill 42 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.¹ 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.²

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.

Fourteen states and 26 municipalities now offer public financing systems to empower voters and help candidates run campaigns that are more focused on the people they are running to represent.³ 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.⁴ A 2020 study from Georgetown University found that since Seattle began Democracy Vouchers in 2017 the donor pool has become increasingly diverse.⁵

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 wealthy donors or special interests. Seventy-five percent (75%) of voters voted for Los Angeles'

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

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

³ "Guide to Public Financing Programs Nationwide", Brennan Center for Justice, 6/10/2024, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/guide-public-financing-programs-nationwide>

⁴ "2018 Fair Elections in Berkeley", Maplight, 2019, <https://maplightarchive.org/story/2018-fair-elections-in-berkeley/>

⁵ "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>

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, and 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.

SB 42 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.

SB 42 would not create public financing of campaigns or require any government to offer public financing. It would simply repeal the ban. 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 STRONGLY SUPPORT SB 42 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)
Bay Area Rising
California Council of Churches IMPACT
California Democratic Council
California Donor Table
California Environmental Voters
Californians for Disability Rights
Consumer Watchdog
Courage California
Dolores Huerta Foundation
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
End Citizens United
Endangered Habitats League
Engage San Diego
Hmong Innovating Politics
Indivisible CA Green Team
Inland Empire United

Los Angeles for Democracy Vouchers
Money Out Voters In
Represent.Us
Starting Over Strong
Working Partnerships USA

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