

League of Women Voters of Illinois
Testimony for Illinois House of Representatives
Elections & Campaign Finance Committee
Subject Matter Hearing: HB5531
May 1, 2018

Good Morning. My name is Paula Lawson. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in favor of the Small Donor Democracy Matching System for Fair Elections Act, HB 5531.

I am here representing the League of Women Voters of Illinois, a nonpartisan grassroots organization, whose purpose is to promote and protect the process of representative government. We work to increase and enhance citizen participation in the election process.

HB 5531 fulfills the League's belief that the *method* of financing political campaigns should *enable and encourage* candidates to compete *equitably* for public office. The proposed System will provide opportunity for a more diverse slate of candidates, and more options for voters at the polls.

We believe that the Small Donor Matching System will help local grassroots candidates by reducing barriers to entry that discourage everyday Americans from running for office.

Let me cite research compiled in the Brennan Center for Justice Report, *Breaking Down Barriers: The Faces of Small Donor Public Financing*.¹

Fact: Candidates of color raise 47% less funds than their white counterparts.²

Listen to what Gary Winfield, State Senator from Connecticut, says about his state's campaign finance law, a law similar to HB 5531:

“Without public financing, I would not have been a viable candidate. The fact that Connecticut had the system is what helped me enter the contest. If I had to raise money to challenge somebody, it would have been almost impossible. I didn't come from money. I am a candidate of color, and I wasn't a candidate for the political party or machine apparatus. It [public financing] not only leveled the playing field, but completely upended the playing field.”

¹ See DeNora Getachew and Ava Mehta editors, *Breaking Down Barriers: The Faces of Small Donor Public Financing*, The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School, www.brennancenter.org.

² See Laura M. Albright, *Not Simply Black and White: The Relationship Between Race/Ethnicity and Campaign Finance in State Legislative Elections*, Am. Pol. Sci. Ass'n, Aug. 4, 2014, available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2475889.

Fact: Women are less likely to be recruited to run and less likely to seek office because of the perception that they will have a more difficult time raising money to campaign.³

Amanda Fritz, Portland, Oregon Commissioner states:

“After Portland voters did away with public financing in 2010, I had to spend much more time dialing for dollars. When you’re making fundraising calls, you’re often not talking about policy at all, and you’re certainly not going to as many community events and developing policy with community engagement.”

Fact: State legislative candidates from states with small donor matching systems spend 1/3 the time fundraising than by those who do not participate in such systems.⁴

Mark Kleinschmidt, Former Mayor of Chapel Hill, North Carolina says:

“Public financing actually gets you out there to do the real work of a campaign: connect with voters, allow voters to have a more personal connection with candidates, and become more invested in a campaign.”

A democracy is a system of government in which power is vested in the people governed.

Small Donor Matching Systems enhance political equality for all citizens and encourage maximum participation by citizens in the political process.

Democracy is **not** an easy thing. We have to want it. We have to nurture it.

We have to work to remove the barriers to full participation.

Let’s start by enacting HB 5531: A Small Donor Matching System for Illinois.

³ See Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *Why Are Women Still Not Running for Public Office*, Brookings Inst., May 2008, available at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2008/5/women-lawless-fox/05_women_lawless_fox.pdf.

⁴ See Peter L. Francia and Paul S. Herrnson, *The Impact of Public Financing Laws on Fundraising in State Legislative Elections*, *Am. Pol. Res.*, 31:5 (2003), at 531, available at <http://apr.sagepub.com/content/31/5/520.abstract>.