

## **LWVIL 2017 Issues Briefing: Campaign Finance Reform and Ethics Reform**

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US Supreme Court Rulings have had the effect of exponentially increasing the amount of money that can be used to influence federal elections. The Citizens United v. FEC (Federal Election Commission), January, 2010, ruling found that in the electoral context the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives corporations, like people, free speech protections and spending money is a form of speech. This allows corporations, unions and other entities to make unlimited “independent expenditures” to influence elections. The April, 2014 decision in McCutcheon v. FEC ruled that, while the total given to each candidate is still limited, individual donors are now able to donate to every candidate of their choosing. The total aggregate limits on contributions are lifted and candidates and parties can collect substantially larger sums from individual donors.

### Activity in Illinois

The first legislation in Illinois to place limits on contributions to campaigns in Illinois, PA 96-0832 took effect on January 1, 2011. The legislation placed limits on contributions that individuals, corporations, unions and associations, and PACs can make to candidates and political parties. LWVIL has opposed subsequent legislation in 2012 and 2013 allowing contribution limits to be removed in a Primary or General Election race, permitting candidates to receive unlimited contributions. Limits are removed if: A candidate or immediate family member contributes or loans over \$250,000 (for statewide offices) or \$100,000 (for all other offices) to the candidate’s campaign; or Individuals or Independent Expenditure Committees (aka Super PACs) make more than \$250,000 (statewide offices) or \$100,000 (all other offices) in independent expenditures supporting or opposing a candidate.

Illinois is seeing a trend where it is becoming increasingly easy for campaigns to remove contribution limits. **In the 2016 General Election, 4 of 13 contested State Senate races and 17 of 48 State House races had limits removed. This means that of the 61 contested General Assembly races this November, 34% had contribution limits removed.** In 2014, limits were removed for six House races, and no Senate races. In 2012, limits were removed for just one House race and one Senate race.

In 2015 the League supported, PA 99-0437, legislation that closed a reporting gap and increased the frequency of reporting requirements for independent expenditures related to political campaigns.

Following a national study the LWVUS adopted an updated position on Money in Politics in April 2016, <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/lwvus-position-money-politics> making League better able to respond to current campaign finance issues.

Outlook: The LWVIL will work with Illinois Campaign for Political Reform (ICPR) and other coalition partners on legislation to increase transparency such as requiring Dark Money Groups to Register as Political Committees, requiring Donor Names on Advertisements, and reporting the original source of donations. If proposed, LWVIL may support Public Financing and Small Donor Matching Systems.