

League of Women Voters of Illinois
Statement for Illinois Campaign Finance Reform Task Force
Monday, April 22, 2013

The issue of campaign finance reform has been a top priority of the League of Women Voters of the United States since the 1970s. Likewise, since the mid-1990's, the League of Women Voters of Illinois has been working to promote public understanding, support, and advocacy for reforming Illinois' campaign finance system. The League believes that the system of financing political campaigns should ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption, limit undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and allow maximum citizen participation in the political process.

Key to combating corruption and limiting undue influence in political campaigns is to put limits on the size of donations that individuals, businesses, unions and other associations can give to candidates and political parties.

Campaign contribution limits legislation was passed in Illinois in 2009 and took effect in January 2011. These limits have only been in effect for one General Election cycle in Illinois. To the knowledge of the League of Women Voters these limits did not impede the ability of candidates in Illinois to raise the money they needed to compete in elections in 2012.

One of the concerns in having contribution limits in Illinois is the US Supreme Court *Citizens United* ruling, that independent expenditures can't corrupt since they are not done in concert or coordinated with a candidate. As a result of this ruling there were some independent expenditure activities in Illinois for the 2012 election. However, these expenditures did not influence the outcome of elections in November 2012. According to an Illinois Campaign for Political Reform Report January 7, 2013 on *Super PAC and Independent Expenditures*, independent expenditures on political ads "failed to deliver the desired result (58 times) than did the elections returns match the intent of the ads (19 times)."

A Paul Simon Public Policy Institute White Paper – Ethics and Reform in Illinois-September 27, 2012 found corruption in government is a concern for Illinois citizens. When asked, *Would you say corruption in Illinois Government is widespread or not?* Of respondents 77% said yes, 16% no and 7% other/don't know. When questioned on proposals to reform Illinois government, six in ten voters surveyed supported limiting the amount of money that party leaders can transfer to other candidates in the general election, as they did in 2010 and 2011 Simon Polls.

The Supreme Court has long recognized that large contributions to candidates and parties pose a direct threat of government corruption. Nothing in the Citizens United decision changes this Court position. The League believes that one of the ways to combat corruption is to maintain campaign contribution limits to candidates and political parties.

The League of Women Voters of Illinois urges the Illinois Campaign Finance Reform Task Force to recommend that the General Assembly maintain campaign contribution limits and thanks you for considering our testimony.

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