

State Elections Enforcement Commission



Press Release

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STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION OPPOSES BUDGET THAT WOULD “SUSPEND” CEP FOR 2016

HARTFORD, CT – November 18, 2015 – In reaction to a proposed budget by the Democratic leaders of the General Assembly that was released on Monday, November 16, that would suspend the Citizens’ Election Program for the 2016 election cycle, the State Elections Enforcement Commission took the rare step of voting on a resolution to oppose the plan. “The bi-partisan, citizen Commission unanimously opposes the Democrats’ proposed budget that would suspend the successful and nationally recognized Citizens’ Election Program for the 2016 election cycle. Such a suspension would set the CEF on course for permanent underfunding and would return our candidates for elected office back on the path to the reliance on special interest money for their campaigns and reverse a decade of progress. When the CEP was passed in 2005, it was done because everyone at that time realized that corruption is far more expensive than the cost of a clean election program. That has not changed. This budget is detrimental to the Citizens’ Election Program, and will result in the justified erosion of public confidence in campaign finance in Connecticut.” The Commission is composed of five citizen Commissioners appointed by both Democratic and Republican office holders.

“There should be no question that if the CEP is defunded and suspended for 2016, clean elections in Connecticut are over,” said Michael J. Brandi, Executive Director and General Counsel of the SEEC. “If, as some have said, candidates ‘could revert back to the old 2005 system’ then we’re talking about returning the same environment that created the need for the CEP in the first place. State contractors could give, lobbyists could give much more, and special interests could underwrite candidates’ campaigns.” Public Act 2005-05, An Act Concerning Comprehensive Reform for State-wide Constitutional and General Assembly Offices, passed ten years ago this fall, established a system of public financing for election campaigns, but also banned contributions from state contractors and lobbyists, and enabled a massively improved system of campaign finance disclosure.

“Public 05-5 was comprehensive because it needed to be. Campaigns cost money. If you eliminate special interest money, you must provide another source. The people of Connecticut decided that small contributions from individuals and public grants were a cleaner, better source. If you eliminate that clean source, where will the money come from?” asked Brandi. “Since 2005, the number of special interest political committees has dropped by half in Connecticut, but also *Citizens United* and *SpeechNow* were decided. Now there are SuperPACs and groups making so-called independent expenditures with dark money. To date, those groups have had a very limited influence in Connecticut. That will not continue if we abandon public financing.”

The suspension of the CEF for 2016 and corresponding sweep of \$11.7 million dollars, comes on the heels of the passage of SB 1502 earlier this year, which will sweep another \$7.5 million dollars from the fund for FY 2017. The balance of funds remaining combined with anticipated deposits over the next three years will leave the CEF with a fraction of the funds required to conduct elections in 2018. As a further result, the Fund will remain underfunded on a perpetual basis. Practically speaking, this proposed suspension would deliver a mortal wound to the clean election program.

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