

rhode
islanders

for FAIR ELECTIONS

Women and Fair Elections

Public Financing Overview

Public Financing of Elections is a voluntary system for the public financing of elections that seeks to remove the influence of money in politics. It is based on the idea that any qualified person should be able to run for political office and represent his or her community regardless of how much money he or she has. Public financing reinforces the direct communication between voters and representatives by allowing candidates to concentrate on issues rather than fundraising.

Under the system, participating candidates collect a certain number of qualifying contributions to demonstrate political viability. Qualified candidates receive state funds for running both primary and general election campaigns, and publicly financed candidates running against privately financed candidates receive additional funds to remain financially competitive with their opponent.

Inadequate Representation of Women



Women are severely underrepresented in government in general, and the current Rhode Island legislature is no exception. Of the 113 seats in Rhode Island's General Assembly, only 23 are held by women. According to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, Rhode Island ranks 32nd of the 50 states in percentage of women in state legislatures. There are currently no women representing The Ocean State on the national level in Congress, and Rhode Island has never had a female governor.

“As a [Fair] Election candidate, I feel completely unencumbered... My first term, I served on the Joint Standing Committee on Insurance and Financial Services, one of the most heavily lobbied committees in the Legislature...It didn't take lobbyists long to see I was a lost cause, though...thanks to [Fair] Elections, I'm answerable only to my constituents and I wouldn't want it any other way.”

—Maine Representative Marilyn Canavan

A Fair Elections system increases female political participation.

Fair Elections increases political participation among all groups, but especially among women. In Arizona, for example, voter turnout increased by 67% from 1988 to 2004 under the public financing system.

Many of the issues most pertinent to women are also the most heavily lobbied. By taking the money out of politics, Fair Elections ensures that these issues will be addressed through the discussion of ideas and not through the exchange of money.



“I chose to run using the [Fair] Elections System because...when I ran using traditional campaign financing...I spent hours on the phone calling donors, begging...for campaign dollars...I would definitely like to see more women running for office.”

–Maine Senator Christine Savage

More women are using Fair Elections.

Women have not hesitated to take advantage of the Fair Elections system where it is available. In Maine’s 2004 elections, for example, 82% of successfully elected women were publicly funded. Surveys indicated that the availability of public financing was a significant factor in these women’s decisions to run for political office. Since the year 2000, over 300 publicly funded campaigns have been run by women using the Fair Elections system.

The Fair Elections system levels the playing field.

Incumbents have access to wealthy donors and are likely to outspend their challengers. Since the vast majority of current legislators are men, this incumbent advantage translates to a male advantage. Fair elections offers the solution, as publicly funded female candidates are more financially competitive than privately financed female candidates. In the Maine Senate elections of 2002, publicly funded women had \$2.54 for every \$1 that they would have had without Fair Elections.

Representation has already improved in Maine and Arizona.

In both Maine and Arizona, there has already been a marked increase in the number of women seeking and obtaining political office. In Maine, nearly half of the women candidates claimed they could not have run without the system. In Arizona, over 80% of publicly funded women said the same. The number of women running for office increased by over 10% in both states following the implementation of the Fair Elections system.

Visit www.FairElectionsRI.org for more information.

The information for this brochure was collected from the following sources:

<http://www.neaction.org/women.legislators.leaders.pdf>

http://azclean.org/documents/2006ElectionStatistics_000.pdf

http://www.azclean.org/articles/documents/2000_election_report.pdf

<http://www.maineclipselections.org/pdfs/CE2004GeneralAnalysisresults.pdf>