

FUNDING THE PUBLIC FINANCING OF ELECTIONS ACT

The cost of full public financing of statewide and legislative campaigns would vary according to the number of candidates who choose to participate in the system. With high participation levels of 50-80%, similar to what Arizona and Maine have experienced, the projected cost for Rhode Island is \$5-9 million annually.

Public financing will cost each Rhode Islander about the price of one movie ticket each year.

How can we fund Public Financing of Elections?

The Public Financing system is partially funded by a voluntary \$5 tax check-off, as well as larger contributions on tax returns. Additionally, any interest gained by the Public Financing of Campaigns fund and any fines levied against candidates who attempt to abuse the system will go into the Public Financing of Elections fund.

When I'm walking the halls of the legislature and I see lobbyists from major corporations or even small organizations, I know that I get to make decisions that think about all the people in my constituencies, all the people in my district and not just specific interest groups.

Maine Senator Beth Edmonds

RHODE ISLANDERS FOR FAIR ELECTIONS

The campaign for Fair Elections is supported by a spectrum of Rhode Island community groups, including: Common Cause RI, the Green Party of Rhode Island, the League of Women Voters of Rhode Island, Operation Clean Government, RIPIRG, the American Association of University Women, USAW-RI, the Environmental Council of RI, Providence College for Fair Elections, and Brown University Democracy Matters. Legislation has been introduced in both the RI House and Senate, sponsored by Representative Edith Ajello and Senator Rhoda Perry. If you would like to support Rhode Islanders for Fair Elections, please visit our website (www.FairElectionsRI.org) or email us (Info@FairElectionsRI.org).

OVERVIEW

The Public Financing of Elections Act is a viable, practical reform with a demonstrated track record of success in both Maine and Arizona. With higher voter turnout and increased representation of women and minorities, both Maine and Arizona have been politically reenergized. By allowing legislators to spend more time with their constituents and less time fundraising, the system has proven to be incredibly beneficial to voters and legislators. Through your support of the Public Financing of Campaigns Act, the Rhode Island General Assembly can continue to lead the way towards an ever more representative democracy.

rhode islanders
for FAIR ELECTIONS



“It’s a win-win all around – for voters and for candidates”
Arizona Representative Martha Garcia

www.FairElectionsRI.org

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WHAT IS THE PUBLIC FINANCING OF ELECTIONS ACT?

The Public Financing of Elections Act is based on the premise that all Rhode Islanders deserve the equal right to run for office and represent their communities. By establishing a voluntary system of full public financing for all statewide and legislative offices, with matching funds available to candidates outspent by privately funded opponents, public financing works to level the playing field and increase government accountability.

WHERE DOES FULL PUBLIC FINANCING EXIST?

- Arizona, Maine, and Connecticut offer full public financing for all statewide legislative races
- New Mexico, North Carolina, and Vermont offer full public financing for various levels of office
- Albuquerque, Portland, and Los Angeles offer full public financing for city-wide races

WHO SUPPORTS PUBLIC FINANCING?

National supporters of public financing include: A.F.L.-C.I.O., the Sierra Club, the N.A.A.C.P., the National Organization for Women, the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Unitarian-Universalists, and Democracy Matters

I think the [Public Financing of Elections Act] helps individuals make good decisions electing people into office...and gives better opportunities to voters by giving them a varied choice of strong candidates for whom to vote...I think [public financing] allows candidates to focus on being productive legislators and not on being productive campaigners.
Arizona Representative Steve Gallardo

Minorities and Women

Public financing levels the playing field for everyone.

Under systems of full public financing in Maine and Arizona, women and minorities have been running for office at significantly higher rates. The number of Latinos running for office in Arizona has increased 220%, with nearly 65% of them accepting public funds. As a result, minority voters are turning out to the polls in record numbers. Similarly, in Maine, a record number of women have successfully sought political office. Of these women, 42% say they would not have run if not for the public financing system.

I decided to run a [publicly financed] campaign to show the voters who I thought was important. Sure, I could have collected more than enough money to run a successful campaign on my own, but I wanted to ensure to myself and the people that my constituents were the only ones that I had allegiance to.

Arizona Representative Martha Garcia

WHY HAVE FULL PUBLIC FINANCING?

Legislators

With less time spent fundraising, publicly financed candidates can spend more time talking with constituents.

In a system of full public financing, legislators running for reelection no longer have to spend time fundraising, so they can focus their time on reaching out to their constituencies. Public financing allows incumbents to concentrate on doing what they do best: legislating.

Voters

With financial barriers eliminated, voters can choose from a wider range of candidates.

The millions of dollars Rhode Island candidates spend each election cycle discourages citizens without financial resources from running for office. By offering public funding, the Public Financing of Elections Act increases representation of traditionally disadvantaged communities. With campaign costs skyrocketing, 50% of all legislative races in Rhode Island go uncontested, and voter turnout continues to fall. In Arizona, voter turnout has increased by nearly 25%, and Maine is experiencing a nearly 80% participation rate under the system of full public financing.